

# Tips for Alzheimer's Caregivers during COVID 19

Caring for a person with Alzheimer's can be challenging in normal conditions. Add the stress faced by caregiving during the Covid 19 pandemic and it can be overwhelming. The reality of living during a pandemic changes our daily routines, limits our social engagement and requires us to take precautions to stay safe. This may be difficult for us to comply, but it is even more difficult for a person with Alzheimer's.

There are several things a caregiver can do to help cope with the stress and make the situation better for themselves and their loved one with Alzheimer's.

## **Routine**

Most likely your routine has greatly changed since March. Your loved one may no longer be going to adult day care or you may have temporarily moved your loved one to your home. You are not going out or socializing as much as before. This change in activity and routine can cause anxiety and can make your loved one become more agitated, upset or restless.

Try to establish a routine each day. Keep your meals approximately the same time and schedule a time for exercising, listening to music, cleaning, playing a game etc. The consistency and predictability of a routine can be calming during this stressful time.

## **Limit the News**

Try to limit the amount of time you watch the news. The news is often negative and can increase anxiety and depression. The news can be especially difficult for a person with Alzheimer's to understand. They may not be able to process or comprehend the information and may misunderstand what is being reported.

## **Staying Covid Safe**

Your loved one may not understand the need or remember to wear a mask, wash their hands or practice social distancing. Don't provide lengthy explanations with logic and details that your loved one won't understand. Set up a "hand cleaning station" by the front door with a hand sanitizer that has a nice smell. Put up a sign that says "clean your hands to stay healthy" and put the hand sanitizer on your hands and your loved ones before leaving and when coming home. You can also put some in the car with the same sign. Make this part of your routine.

Wearing a mask may also be a challenge. There are several types of masks; one that fits around the ears; one that ties behind the head and one that covers the neck and pulls up over the face. Look for a mask that is soft, comfortable and has a design or color that your loved one will like. Your request to wear the mask will need to depend on how much they understand Covid 19. You may need to keep your directions simple, such as "We have to wear a mask to stay healthy. We must put it on before we can go in the store. Here is your favorite blue mask. I have my pink mask. Now we both look great!"



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Try to put the masks on in the car. Give them something to hold in order to distract them and keep their hands busy so they (hopefully) won't take the mask off. If your loved one absolutely refuses, you may have to change your plans and try again another day.

### **Stay Engaged**

We are fortunate to live in a time with so much technology to keep us connected. Reach out to family and friends and schedule regular phone calls, Zoom dates, Facetime visits etc. Don't wait for others to contact you! Staying connected with people is very important for both the caregiver and the person with Alzheimer's. Schedule some calls with your loved to allow them to engage with family and friends. It is also recommended to schedule some time to talk to others without your loved one so you can be candid about how you are both doing.

Not all activities need to involve technology. Play a variety of music and sing, dance and enjoy! Try simple puzzles, games and art. Plant flowers, bake cookies, watch old musicals on TV, look at old picture albums and reminisce. Try chair exercises and take walks.

### **Care to the Caregiver**

We always stress the importance of taking care of the caregiver and putting the oxygen on first to insure you are in good condition before helping others. However, that is a challenge now. Listen to relaxing music and meditate. If you are religious, join a prayer group or listen to online services. Arrange for family visits outside on the driveway or the patio where you can social distance but still chat and feel connected to family. Attend a virtual support group or take advantage of counseling if you are feeling overwhelmed.

### **Resources**

Many organizations offer free or inexpensive programs and are offering even more during the coronavirus pandemic. Others sites are worth checking for great resources for Alzheimer's activities and products. Here are a few to check out:

- Go to your county library website for classes, exercise programs and links to free museum tours.
- AARP Community Connections <http://aarpcommunityconnections.org>. You can join a mutual aid group, participate in a special interest group, request a regular phone call from an AARP volunteer, take an online exercise class and much more!
- Many universities offer Lifelong Learning programs at a minimal cost. The University of South Florida has The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at USF (OLLI-USF). OLLI offers low cost programs for adults age 50+. All of their programs are currently online.  
<https://www.usf.edu/continuing-education/olli/>
- You Tube [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) You can watch cooking classes, concerts, comedians, exercise classes and more! (Search "Eileen Poiley", the director of education at the Byrd Institute, to listen to some of her presentations)
- The Alzheimer's Store [www.alzstore.com](http://www.alzstore.com) contains products for safety, engagement and activities.
- Amazon- [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) Search for "Alzheimer's Activities" to find activities, puzzles, games and crafts designed for individuals with Alzheimer's.



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