Caring for a person with Alzheimer’s disease is a challenge that calls upon the patience, creativity, knowledge, and skills of each family caregiver. We hope that this information will help you cope with some of these challenges and develop creative solutions to increase the security and freedom of the person with Alzheimer’s in your home, as well as your own peace of mind.

General Safety Concerns
People with Alzheimer have become increasingly unable to take care of themselves. However, individuals will move through the disease in their own unique manner. As a caregiver, you face the ongoing challenge of adapting to each change in the person’s behavior and functioning. The following general principles may be helpful:

Home Safety Room-By-Room
Prevention begins with a safety check of every room in your house. Use the room-by-room checklist on the following pages to alert you to potential hazards and to record any changes you need to make.

Throughout The Home
- Display emergency numbers and your home address near all telephones.
- Use a telephone answering machine when you cannot answer calls. The person with Alzheimer’s often is unable to take messages or may be a target for telephone exploitation by solicitors. When the answering machine is on, turn down the phone bell to avoid disruptive ringing.
- Install smoke alarms near all bedrooms; check their functioning and batteries frequently.
- Avoid the use of flammable and volatile compounds near gas water heaters. Do not store these materials in an area where a gas pilot light is used.
- Install secure locks on all outside doors and windows.
- Hang a bell or other object that makes noise on your doors. You need to know if your family member has wandered outside.
- Hide a spare house key outside in case the person with Alzheimer’s locks you out of the house.
- Avoid the use of extension cords if possible by placing lamps and appliances close to electrical outlets. Tack extension cords to the baseboards of a room to avoid tripping.
- Cover unused outlets with childproof plugs.
- Place red tape around floor vents, radiators and other heating devices to deter the person with dementia from standing on or touching a hot grid.
- Check all rooms for adequate lighting.
- Remove valuables that can easily be hidden or forgotten to a safe place.

Outside Approaches To The House
- Keep steps study and textured to prevent falls in wet or icy weather.
- Mark the edges of steps with bright or reflective tape.
- Consider a ramp with handrails into the home rather than steps.
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Use a foam rubber faucet cover (often used for small children) in the tub to prevent serious injury should the person with Alzheimer’s fall.

Use plastic shower stools and a hand-held showerhead to make bathing easier.

In the shower, tubs and sink, use a single faucet that mixes hot and cold water to avoid burns.

Adjust the water heater to 120 degrees to avoid scalding tap water.

Living Room

- Clear all walk areas of electrical cords.
- Remove scatter rugs or throw rugs. Repair or replace torn carpet.
- Place decals at eye level on sliding glass doors, picture windows, or further with large glass panels to identify the glass pane.
- Do not leave the person with Alzheimer’s alone with an open fire in the fireplace, or consider alternative heating sources. Remove matches and cigarette lighters.
- Keep the controls for cable or satellite TV, VCR and stereo system out of sight.

Home Safety Behavior-By-Behavior

Although a number of behavior and sensory problems may accompany Alzheimer’s, not every person will experience the disease in exactly the same way. As the disease progresses, particular behavioral changes can create safety problems.

Wandering

- Do not leave a person with Alzheimer’s who has a history of wandering unattended.
- Consider making an up-to-date home video of the person with Alzheimer’s.
- Give local police, neighbors and relatives a recent picture, along with the name and pertinent information about the person with Alzheimer’s, as a precaution should he or she become lost. Keep extra pictures on hand.
- Notify neighbors of the person’s potential to wander or become lost. Alert them to contact you or the police immediately if the individual is seen alone and on the move.
- Place labels in garments to aid in identification. Check with the local Alzheimer’s Association about the Safe Return program.
- Obtain a medical identification bracelet for the person with Alzheimer’s with the words “memory loss” inscribed along with an emergency telephone number. Place the bracelet on the person’s dominant hand to limit the possibility of removal, or solder the bracelet closed.
- Reduce clues that symbolize departure such as shoes, keys, suitcases or hats.
- Divert the attention of the person with Alzheimer’s away from using the door by placing small scenic posters on the door; placing removable gates, curtains or brightly colored streamers across the door; or wallpapering the door to match any adjoining walls.
- If possible, secure the yard with fencing and a lock gate. Use door alarms such as loose bells above the door or devices that ring when the doorknob is touched or the door is opened.
- Use loosely fitting doorknob covers so that the cover turns instead of the actual knob. Due to the potential hazard they could cause if an emergency exit is needed, locked doors and doorknob covers should be used only when a caregiver is present.

Rummaging/Hiding Things

- Lock up all dangerous or toxic products, or place them out of the person’s reach.
- Remove all old or spoiled food from the refrigerator and cupboards. A person with Alzheimer’s may rummage for snacks but may lack the judgment or taste to rule out spoiled foods.
- Simplify the environment by removing clutter or valuable items that could be misplaced, lost or hidden by the person with dementia. These include important papers, checkbooks, charge cards and jewelry.
If your yard has a fence with a locked gate, place the mailbox outside the gate. People with Alzheimer’s often hide, lose, or throw away mail. If this is a serious problem, consider obtaining a post office box.

Create a special place for the person with Alzheimer’s to rummage freely or sort (for example: a chest of drawers, a bag of selected objects, or a basket of clothing to fold or unfold). Often, safety problems occur when the person with Alzheimer’s becomes bored or does not know what to do.

Provide the person with Alzheimer’s a safe box, treasure chest, or cupboard to store special objects.

Search the house periodically to discover hiding places. Once found, these hiding places can be discreetly and frequently checked.

Keep all trashcans covered or out of sight. The person with Alzheimer’s may not remember the purpose of the container or may rummage through it. Also check carefully when emptying garbage cans, as your loved one may have thrown something important away.

Check trash containers before emptying them in case something has been hidden there or accidentally thrown away.

### Hallucinations, Illusions & Delusions

- Paint walls a light color to reflect more light. Use solid colors, which are less confusing to an impaired person than a patterned wall. Large, bold prints (for example, florals in wallpaper or drapes) may cause confusing illusions.
- Make sure there is adequate lighting and keep extra bulbs handy in a secured place. Dimly lit areas may produce confusing shadows or difficulty with interpreting everyday objects.
- Reduce glare by using soft light or frosted bulbs, partially closing blinds or curtain and maintaining adequate globes or shades on light fixtures.
- Remove or cover mirrors if they cause the person with Alzheimer’s to become confused or frightened.
- Ask if the person can point to a specific area that is producing confusion. Perhaps one particular aspect of the environment is being misinterpreted.

### Impairment Of The Senses

- Alzheimer’s can cause changes in a person’s ability to interpret what they see, hear, feel or smell, even though the sense organs may still be intact. The person with Alzheimer’s should be evaluated periodically by a physician for any such changes that may be correctable with glasses, dentures, hearing aids, or other treatments.
- Create color contrast between floors and walls to help the person see depth. Floor coverings are less visually confusing if they are a solid color.

### Suggestions For The Family Caregiver

- Accept the changes in your loved one. Some are gradual; some are swift. Don’t live in denial. You miss opportunities for effective intervention of your maintain denial.
- Take control. Make decisions based on what your loved one needs. Accept counsel, but don’t become conflicted or immobilized by differing opinions. Be firm, even when it hurts.
- Don’t argue with your loved one. If you try and convince the person with dementia who you are and where they are, it will further confuse and frustrate them.
- Offer to help, but don’t take over. Conversely, let your loved one try and help, even if it means having to redo something later. This can make them feel loved and validated as a person who contributes to the home.
- Take care of yourself. Because you have increased responsibility, more demands on your time, and a change in your routine, caring for a loved one with Alzheimer’s adds more stress to your life.
- Surround yourself with a strong support system. While you’re caring for your loved one, make sure you have an outlet—whether it’s someone to physically help you or to lend a sympathetic ear.
References
ADEAR
Phone: (770) 973-0687
Website: www.averamgmt.net

Murner, Agnes Miller. Because I’ve Been There: A Journey Through Alzheimer’s.

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