Alzheimer's Caregiving Tips

Managing Personality and Behavior Changes

Alzheimer's disease causes brain cells to die, so the brain works less well over time. This changes how a person acts. This tip sheet has suggestions that may help you understand and cope with changes in personality and behavior in a person with Alzheimer's disease.

Common Changes in Personality and Behavior

Common personality and behavior changes you may see include:

- Getting upset, worried, and angry more easily
- Acting depressed or not interested in things
- Hiding things or believing other people are hiding things
- Imagining things that aren't there
- Wandering away from home
- Pacing a lot
- Showing unusual sexual behavior
- Hitting you or other people
- Misunderstanding what he or she sees or hears

You also may notice that the person stops caring about how he or she looks, stops bathing, and wants to wear the same clothes every day.

In addition to changes in the brain, other things may affect how people with Alzheimer's behave:

- Feelings such as sadness, fear, stress, confusion, or anxiety
- Health-related problems, including illness, pain, new medications, or lack of sleep
- Other physical issues like infections, constipation, hunger or thirst, or problems seeing or hearing
- Problems in their surroundings, like too much noise or being in an unfamiliar place

If you don't know what is causing the problem, call the doctor. It could be caused by a physical or medical issue.

NIH National Institute on Aging

Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center

Keep Things Simple…and Other Tips

Caregivers cannot stop Alzheimer's-related changes in personality and behavior, but they can learn to cope with them. Here are some tips:

- Keep things simple. Ask or say one thing at a time.
- Have a daily routine, so the person knows when certain things will happen.
- Reassure the person that he or she is safe and you are there to help.
- Focus on his or her feelings rather than words. For example, say, "You seem worried."
- Don't argue or try to reason with the person.
- Try not to show your frustration or anger. If you get upset, take deep breaths and count to 10. If it's safe, leave the room for a few minutes.
- Use humor when you can.
- Give people who pace a lot a safe place to walk.
- Try using music, singing, or dancing to distract the person.
- Ask for help. For instance, say, "Let's set the table" or "I need help folding the clothes."

For more caregiving tips and other resources:

- **Read** "Caring for a Person with Alzheimer's Disease": *www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/caring-person-alzheimers-disease*
- **Visit** *www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/topics/caregiving*
- **Call** the ADEAR Center toll-free: 1-800-438-4380

Talk with the person's doctor about problems like hitting, biting, depression, or hallucinations. Medications are available to treat some behavioral symptoms.

The Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center is a service of the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health. The Center offers information and publications for families, caregivers, and professionals about Alzheimer's disease and age-related cognitive changes.

July 2012