

Living With Alzheimer's Disease



Alzheimer's disease is a condition that affects the brain and typically occurs in a person's middle late life. It affects both men and women of all races, cultures, and backgrounds. The disease is a slowly progressing form of dementia, and the rate of progression is different for every person. People with Alzheimer's disease experience memory loss, language problems, and changes in decision-making ability, judgment, and personality. The cause of Alzheimer's disease is unknown.

Alzheimer's disease is caused by a destruction of nerve cells in the brain that leads to a disconnection of areas of the brain that normally work together. The most common risk factors are old age and a family history of dementia. Early to middle stage symptoms of the disease include repeating statements frequently, often misplacing items, difficulty finding names for familiar objects, getting lost on familiar routes, and personality changes.

Because people with Alzheimer's disease may have difficulty completing routine tasks in their day-to-day lives, occupational therapists can help individuals and their families to adapt tasks and environments to help promote or maximize independence, safety and function.

What can an occupational therapist do?

- **Evaluate** and recommend changes for a person and his or her environment to determine how it can be adapted to accommodate the effects of the disease to improve safety and functional capabilities.
- **Develop** new routines for a person with dementia that allow the person to continue the routines on his or her own.
- **Identify** needed home modifications that will promote safety and performance (i.e. lowering counter height allows for seated activities).
- **Teach** individuals and family members to implement home modifications to support safety and capabilities including ways to create simple and clear passageways.
- **Recommend** adaptive equipment, such as bathroom safety aids (i.e. grab bars) that help to prevent falls.

- **Train** family members on strategies to maximize the client's abilities and find ways to manage caregiver stress.

What can friends and family of a person with Alzheimer's disease do?

- **Seek** out a physician's referral for occupational therapy to help manage the person's daily activities, including their personal care.
- **Limit** access to dangerous items, such as flammable liquids, stairwells, and medications.
- **Remove** control knobs on items that also may be dangerous, such as knobs on the oven and stove.
- **Install** deadbolt locks on doors and window to prevent a person with Alzheimer's from wandering outside.

Need more information?

Alzheimer's disease is a serious illness that should not go untreated. Occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants are trained in helping both adults and children with a broad range of physical, cognitive, developmental, and psychological impairments and conditions. Practitioners also help clients and their caregivers with strategies that can prevent injury and

secondary complications, and support health and well being. If you would like to consult an occupational therapist, practitioners are available through most hospitals, medical centers, and community clinics. Contact your local health organizations for more information.