

Our Purpose

Caring for a loved one with memory loss or Alzheimer's disease can be a great challenge. The purpose of this catalog is to provide information on how to modify the home for a person with Alzheimer's. It is intended to provide information about numerous products for families and caregivers to create a safe and comfortable home environment.

Sometimes the person with Alzheimer's disease may feel confused and frightened. By creating safe and comfortable surroundings, you can help the person feel more relaxed and less overwhelmed. Keep in mind that the individual's behavior can influence the safety and security of other family members and residents. By adopting a safety-first attitude, everyone feels more comfortable and secure. As you assess the environment, try to look at the world through your loved one's eyes. A person with Alzheimer's can't understand the meaning of many actions and behaviors. For example, the person might not remember why it's important to dress warmly in cold weather or why eating moldy food is unsafe. Before you introduce specific safety precautions into your living area, consider the points on the following pages.

Action Steps

FOCUS ON PREVENTION

Rather than trying to teach or retrain the person to do things safely, you might be more successful by taking preventive action. For example, to guard against fires or accidental burnings, you may consider removing the knobs from your stove or switching the breaker off.

TAKE AN ADULT APPROACH

Keep communication on an adult level. Help the person understand such safety hazards as smoking and then work with him to change dangerous behavior. You may need to take action by removing cigarettes or lighters, as the Alzheimer's patient may forget that smoking can be dangerous.

BE PATIENT AND SLOW DOWN

Keep in mind that many accidents occur when the person with Alzheimer's is rushed. It takes time—sometimes more than a minute—for the person to understand or remember what to do and where to go. And as the disease progresses, basic activities of daily living will probably consume even more time.

SIMPLIFY ROUTINES

Keep in mind that many accidents occur in the realm of personal care, involving activities of bathing, toileting, dressing, or eating. You can help avoid accidents by breaking down complicated procedures, guiding the person through a simple, step-by-step process, and giving the individual enough time to complete each task.

CREATE EMERGENCY PLANS

Prepare a list of emergency phone numbers and addresses for the local police and fire departments. Include numbers for hospitals and poison control help lines. Post the list near each phone in the house.

DO WHAT YOU THINK IS BEST

Rely on your common sense and do what you think is in the individual's best interests. Trade-offs may be necessary in balancing the person's safety versus maintaining the patient's privacy or respecting the person's need for independence.

BE RESPONSIBLE IN YOUR APPROACH TO SAFETY

Be realistic about what you can do. You'll never be able to anticipate every risk or prevent every problem. In addition, there's no way you can experience the world in the same way as the person with the disease.

ADAPT THE HOME FOR ALL FAMILY MEMBERS

Approach home modifications so that all family members will be safe and comfortable. This includes the person with Alzheimer's, the caregiver(s), the rest of the family and visitors. We recommend that you identify the following areas:

1. The Danger Zones

Two areas of the house are "out of bounds" to the person with Alzheimer's disease. Area One consists of rooms such as the garage, basement, and closets where breakable, dangerous, or valuable items are stored. Doors leading to these restricted areas and to the outside should be locked, alarmed, or controlled by wander-prevention devices.

2. The Respite Zone

The second restricted area is dedicated to the caregiver. Anyone caring for someone with Alzheimer's should have a "respite zone." "Burn Out" is a big problem for caregivers and there needs to be a place where one can get away, relax, and have time alone while someone else provides care.

3. The Safe Zone

Finally, the remainder of the home should be accessible to the person with Alzheimer's disease. In this area it is okay for them to roam, rummage, and hide things. "Child-proof" plug outlets and remove medicines, dangerous tools, appliances, and chemicals, as well as important documents, bills, and valuable/breakable objects.

