Supporting a loved one with Alzheimer's disease

Alzheimer's disease is often described as a "family disease" because it can dramatically change the lives not only of the people who have it, but of many people close to them. If someone close to you has been

many things you can do to help you care for them—and yourself.

If someone close to you has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, it's important to find out all you can about the condition. This will help you develop realistic expectations about your loved one's abilities and changing behaviour.

To find out more information, you can:

Read books
Use online resources
Consult with dependent care specialists

- Check out care-giving support groups, workshops and seminars in your area

The most important things for a care-giver to learn about are when, and how to:

- Support a loved one with day-to-day activities.
- Communicate as the disease progresses.
- Manage difficult or unusual behaviour.
- Keep your loved one safe.
- Manage their financial issues and make long-term care decisions.

In the early to mid stages of the disease, while your loved one is relatively independent, you can do many things to make tasks less cumbersome. Consider providing pre-prepared meals and helping with daily chores. As the disease progresses, you may have to consider other arrangements such as the enlisting the assistance of a home care professional, or relocating your loved one to a long-term care facility.

Care-giver tips

Since each person's experience with the symptoms and progression of Alzheimer's disease differs, care-giving techniques will vary. However, it's important to understand that you will have to modify the way you interact with your loved one as the disease progresses. Know that frustration, agitation and even aggression are common reactions when tasks or decisions become difficult. The following tips may help:

Tip	**Example**
Frequently assess the level of assistance your loved one requires.	Do they need help bathing, grooming, dressing or completing other necessary daily activities?
Reduce the complexity of decisions to help reduce anxiety.	Simplify deciding what to wear by offering just two clear options.
Reduce the complexity of tasks to help reduce frustration.	Provide simple one-step-at-a-time instructions if your loved one is having difficulty with a task.
Try to stay flexible and don't worry about the way things "should" or "have always" been done.	If there is no danger in how a loved one chooses to do a task, refrain from correcting them.

Be patient when communicating and understand that your loved one's ability to use language the way they once could will decrease as the disease progresses.	It is common for people with Alzheimer’s to communicate their wants and feelings more through behaviour than through language.
Create a safe environment that's appropriate for different stages of the disease.	Ensure there are clear pathways, working fire extinguishers and smoke alarms and locked cabinets for contain medicine, toxic substances, or sharp objects.

While dealing with today’s challenges is already a lot to manage, thinking about tomorrow can help make the months and years ahead easier. Plan for the future and talk to your loved one about when and who will manage financial and health-related activities and future care-giving decisions.

Lastly, be sure to take care of yourself. Your own care is just as important as your loved one's. This means keeping yourself physically and emotionally healthy, contacting community support groups, asking friends and family for help when you need it, and not taking on more than you can reasonably handle.

Armed with knowledge about the disease, the support of friends, family, and others faced with similar issues, you will be as prepared as possible to deal with the challenges of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer’s.