



COMMUNITY RESOURCE BULLETIN

November: Alzheimer's Awareness Month

5.4 Million People in the U.S. Have Alzheimer's Disease

In New Jersey, Over 435,000 Family Members Care for Someone with Alzheimer's or Related Dementia

Most everyone knows a loved one of someone who suffers from Alzheimer's disease or some other form of dementia. Our hearts go out to them because it's a progressive, unpredictable disease. Each individual is different. One of our specialties at Visiting Angels is to care for the personal and in-home care needs of our beloved Alzheimer's members within our Visiting Angels extended family. We share this information with you in the hopes of helping families understand the nature of Alzheimer's and what can be expected in certain cases. Some of this information is difficult and painful, but knowledge is a powerful tool.



ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE FACTS AND FIGURES

- * In the U.S., a person is diagnosed with Alzheimer's every 69 seconds. Unless medical advances are made, nearly 16 million Americans by 2050 will have Alzheimer's, with a new diagnoses every 33 seconds
- * In New Jersey, 170,000 people have the disease
- * Symptoms first appear after age 60 in most people
- * Alzheimer's disease is an irreversible brain disease that slowly destroys memory and thinking skills; eventually, people lose the ability to perform even the most simple tasks of daily living
- * Early symptoms include difficulty remembering names/recent events, apathy, and depression; later symptoms include impaired judgment, disorientation, confusion, changes in behavior, and trouble speaking, swallowing, and walking
- * Alzheimer's Disease, the 6th leading cause of death, starts in a region of the brain that affects recent memory, then gradually spreads to other parts of the brain
- * Although treatment and early detection can help to slow the progression of Alzheimer's and help manage its symptoms, currently there is no cure

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CARING FOR AN ALZHEIMER'S PATIENT

- * In 2013, there were over 443,000 predominantly family caregivers in the U.S., totaling 505,000,000 unpaid care hours—over \$6 billion in unpaid care
- * 60% of caregivers are women, 87% are family members
- * 10% of family caregivers live over 2 hours from the patient (“long-distance caregivers”)
- * 32% of family caregivers have been caring for over 5 years
- * About 33% of family caregivers have symptoms of depression. “Caregiver stress” (especially related to dealing with a loved one’s behavioral problems) sometimes leads to nursing home placement because the family caregiver is totally depleted, both physically and emotionally, not necessarily because it’s medically necessary or the best option



RESOURCES

- * Project Lifesaver: Eligible residents suffering from Alzheimer’s disease can be provided with tracking bracelets. Mercer County: Mercer County Sheriff’s office (609) 989-6111, (609) 278-7159, (877) 580-5433, or (732) 272-5466. Burlington County: Burlington County Sheriff’s Agent, Mark Van Ness, (609) 265-5796
- * Call the Alzheimer’s Association 24/7 Helpline at 1-800-272-3900 for care consultation, information & referral
- * Alzheimer’s Association Central Regional Office at Princeton, Princeton Junction, NJ 609-275-1180
- * Alzheimer’s Association South Jersey Regional Office, Marlton, NJ 856-797-1212
- * Alzheimer’s Association Website: www.alz.org



Alzheimer's Awareness

Everyone is forgetful now and again, and as we age the occurrences may become even more frequent. Yet most people who have mild forgetfulness do not have Alzheimer's disease. But when memory loss starts to interfere with daily activities, it may be time to consult with a physician.

Alzheimer's disease is not a product of the natural aging process. Scientists do not know what causes the disease; however, age is a factor. The disease usually begins after age 60 and the risk goes up with the increase in age. Approximately five million Americans currently suffer from Alzheimer's disease.

According to the National Institute on Aging, there are seven early warning signs of Alzheimer's disease:

- 1 Asking the same question over and over again.
- 2 Repeating the same story, word for word, again and again.
- 3 Forgetting how to cook, or how to make repairs, or how to play cards—activities that were previously done with ease and regularity.
- 4 Losing one's ability to pay bills or balance one's checkbook.
- 5 Getting lost in familiar surroundings, or misplacing household objects.
- 6 Neglecting to bathe, or wearing the same clothes over and over again, while insisting that they have taken a bath or that their clothes are still clean.
- 7 Relying on someone else, such as a spouse, to make decisions or answer questions they previously would have handled themselves.

The Stages of Alzheimer's

*Developed by Elizabeth Ostuni and Mary Jo Pietro
Lincoln, Nebraska, Chapter, Geriatric Care Managers*

Early "Forgetful" Stages

- Digresses from topic in conversation.
- Tends to repeat self.
- May ramble on and on.
- Relies heavily on clichés.
- Gets along adequately in most social situations.



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Middle Stages

- Makes vague, empty, irrelevant conversation.
- Asks fewer questions.
- Is excessively self-oriented.
- Does not initiate conversation.
- Repeats ideas over and over.
- Withdraws from difficult social situations.
- Can still handle some casual social situations.

Late Stages

- Is no longer aware of social interaction or expectancies.
- Withdraws partially or completely from communication.



Although not everyone experiences the same symptoms in the same order or with the same time schedule, we can generally characterize the progress of the disease in six stages, which may last three to 20 years. Note that these represent stages of brain deterioration; they can be caused by diseases other than Alzheimer's.

Forgetfulness

Very mild cognitive decline:

For example, problems such as: subjective complaints about memory deficit such as placement of familiar objects, forgetting names once known well. There is no objective evidence of deficits in social or employment situations. Don't assume that all confusion and memory loss signal Alzheimer's. Reactions to medications can cause reversible delirium and other medical problems may cause dementia. If you are worried, get a medical diagnosis.

Confusion

Early stage: Mild cognitive decline:

For example, problems such as: getting lost when traveling to a familiar location; noticeably lowered performance level at work; trouble finding words and names; little retention from reading; little or no ability to remember names of new people; loss of a valued object; and trouble concentrating.

Late stage: Moderate cognitive decline:

For example, problems such as: decreased knowledge of current and recent events; deficit in memory of personal history; decreased ability to handle travel or finances; and inability to perform complex tasks. Appropriate responsiveness to outside stimulation decreases sharply. Denial of any problem, and withdrawal from challenging situations are common.

Dementia

Early stage: Moderately severe decline:

For example, the person can no longer survive without some assistance. Patients can't remember names of people or places in their lives. They may be disoriented about time and dates. However, they will require no assistance when using the bathroom or eating, but may need help in getting dressed.

Middle stage: Severe cognitive decline:

For example, the person may forget name of spouse and be unaware of events in his or her life. He or she is entirely dependent on others for survival. He or she may have trouble sleeping in a regular pattern.

Late stage: Very severe cognitive decline:

For example, all verbal abilities are lost and he or she needs help eating and using the bathroom. Eventually he or she loses the ability to walk; the brain appears to no longer be able to tell the body what to do.

Coping with Sundown Syndrome

Sundown syndrome—also called sundowning or sunseting—is a behavior common in people with Alzheimer’s disease. It describes the episodes of confusion, anxiety, agitation, or disorientation that often occur at dusk and into the evening hours. The episodes may last a few hours or throughout the night.



Contributing factors

While the exact cause of sundown syndrome is not known, experts believe there are several contributing factors:

- Physical and mental exhaustion (after a long day)
- An upset in the internal body clock causing a biological mix-up between day and night
- Medication that can cause agitation or confusion
- Disorientation due to the inability to separate dreams from reality when sleeping
- Less need for sleep, which is common among older adults

Suggestions for helping a loved one with sundown syndrome

Sundown syndrome can be draining for the person with Alzheimer’s disease and his or her caregivers. Some suggestions include:

- Schedule the day so that the more difficult tasks are done early in the day, when the person is less likely to become agitated.
- Watch the person’s diet and eating habits. Restrict sweets and drinks with caffeine to the morning hours. Try serving the person a late afternoon snack or an early dinner.
- To help the person relax, try decaffeinated herbal tea or warm milk.
- Keep the house or room well lit. Close the drapes before the sun goes down, so the person doesn’t watch it become dark outside.
- Try distracting the person with activities he or she enjoys. Soothing music or a favorite video may help, as well.
- Plan more active days. A person who rests most of the day is likely to be awake at night. Discourage afternoon napping and plan activities, such as taking a walk, throughout the day.
- Seek medical advice. Physical ailments, such as bladder or incontinence problems, could be making it difficult to sleep. The doctor may also be able to prescribe medication to help the person relax at night.
- Change sleeping arrangements. Allow the person to sleep in a different bedroom, in a favorite chair or wherever it’s most comfortable. Also, keep the room partially lit to reduce agitation that occurs when surroundings are dark or unfamiliar.

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Nighttime restlessness doesn't last forever. It typically peaks in the middle stage of the disease, then diminishes as the disease progresses. In the meantime, caregivers should make sure the home is safe and secure, especially if the person with Alzheimer's wanders. Restrict access to certain rooms or levels by closing and locking doors, and install tall safety gates between rooms. Door sensors and motion detectors can be used to alert family members when a person is wandering.

Once the person is awake and upset, experts suggest that caregivers:

- Approach their loved one in a calm manner
- Find out if there is something he or she needs
- Gently remind him or her of the time
- Avoid arguing or asking for explanations
- Offer reassurance that everything is all right and everyone is safe

When extra care is needed, you can trust Visiting Angels to provide the experience and training to help a family caregiver understand the behaviors of someone with Alzheimer's. Let us work the night hours so a family caregiver can get a solid night of rest in order to be refreshed and ready for a new day of care.



Alzheimer's Wordsearch

S U N D O W N I N G Q A F G M
X S Y M D S G Y S U L I N N E
O X E V I N Y C R Z E O J I D
V N E N I S H M H O I A N D I
R P O G L E P E P T M O I N C
E A A I D U I L A T I E D A A
V T N U S M F C A T O I M T T
I I L X E U I T A C S M Q S I
G E X R I N F T E E I T S R O
E N S R U E I N A G E N S E N
R C H M M G T S O X R P G D S
A E M H A N E Y T C N O J N Z
C O G N I T A E P E R Q F U I
C O G N I T I V E N I L C E D
Y T I L I B A I T N E M E D T

ABILITY
AGING
AGITATION
ALZHEIMERS
ANXIETY
CAREGIVER

COGNITIVE
COMMUNICATION
CONFUSION
DECLINE
DEMENCIA
DISEASE

FORGETFULNESS
MEDICATION
MEMORY
MISPLACING
PATIENCE
REPEATING

SCHEDULE
SUNDOWNING
SYMPTOMS
UNDERSTANDING

Art and Music: Breaking Through the Barriers of Alzheimer's Disease



Nora de Cárdenas, J.D.

Mental impairments caused by Alzheimer's Disease and other aging-related dementias can be so hard on both families and sufferers. Memories and shared experiences are what make us who we are and to watch that slowly slip away to the grips of Alzheimer's and dementia is extremely painful. November is "National Alzheimer's Awareness Month" and in honor of that, I would like to share a wonderful way to connect with your elderly loved ones: "Arts Therapy."

Music Therapy

Familiar songs can help people with Alzheimer's relate to others, move more easily and experience joy. Your mother or father might have forgotten their names, but hearing Benny Goodman or Frank Sinatra might take them back decades and prompt them to dance. Music memory is preserved better than verbal memory because music, unlike language, is not seated in a specific area of the brain but processed across many parts.

There's been a burst of interest in Music Therapy for people with Alzheimer's. Kate Gfeller, who directs the graduate Music Therapy program at the University of Iowa, published a study in the Journal of Music Therapy which found that activities like moving to music, playing rhythm instruments and singing led to more group involvement and less wandering and disruptive behavior among 51 patients with dementia in five nursing facilities. Another study at

the University of Miami School of Medicine demonstrated that music raised melatonin levels and improved behavior and sleeping problems in 20 male Alzheimer's patients.¹

How can you take this research and apply it practically in your loved one's life? The trick is finding out what particular music was popular when your parents were teens and young adults. Those years were a powerful time in their lives ... a time of first love ... of moving into their first home. People will play the music they heard during these years all their lives, and recall it the longest. Here are some additional tips:

- Think about the mood you want to create. Use energetic music to enliven and energize and calming music to help relax and before bedtime.
- Avoid distractions and competing noises by turning off the TV.
- Try to have your loved one listen to about 30-40 minutes of music a day.
- Use our Company's professional senior home care services to, among other things, help design a Music Therapy program specifically for your loved one.

Art Therapy

Art, by its very nature, is one of a kind ... much like our personalities, speaking to each person in a unique way. But, what exactly is Art Therapy? The American Art Therapy Association defines it as "a mental health profession that uses the creative process of art-making to improve and enhance the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages."² Art Therapy is also proving to be a successful tool in dealing with the symptoms of Alzheimer's. A 1999 UK study, for example, showed that half of the Alzheimer's sufferers who took part in a ten-week art therapy course showed a

significant improvement in their symptoms by the end of the study.³

What are some of the ways you can connect through art with your loved one? Taking a stroll through a museum or art gallery is a great way to relax a person with Alzheimer's while providing some exercise. Talking about their own newly-created artwork, either one-on-one or in a group, provides an opportunity to converse about something "in the moment", rather than worry about a forgotten name or fact. It can prove to be relaxing for both the patient and the family member or caregiver.

In addition, Dr. Gayatri Devi, an author and expert in Art Therapy offers the following tips⁴:

- Contact your local Alzheimer's Association for any creative arts programs in your area.
- Pick up art books at the local library to look through together.
- Completion of any art project is not important. It's the "creative process" that counts.
- Keep the project at the adult level. Use watercolors, charcoal and pastels (not crayons, construction paper or felt markers).
- Maintain safety at all

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Non-Medical Adult In-Home Services

times – avoid sharp objects and toxic substances.

- Never criticize the artwork.

Bottom line, if you are feeling frustrated or are seeking a way to connect with your loved one suffering from Alzheimer's and other aging-related mental disorders, there is hope. If you would like help starting or implementing a Music or Art Therapy program with your aging loved one, call us at Visiting Angels. We would be delighted to help bring out again that spark in your loved one that makes them who they really are! Let's give it a try...you may be really surprised at what awaits!

Did you know scores of research overwhelmingly show seniors really want to stay in their homes as they age. However, we all know that aging brings its challenges. Simple things like maintaining social relationships or taking care of a pet can prove to be too much for an aging loved one. Giving the gift of non-medical in-home care can help provide a bridge to keep seniors safe and active. In our next article, we will give you some creative ideas on how to use

in-home care that you might not have thought of! If you have any immediate questions on this article or any other senior home care related topics, please visit www.VisitingAngels.com/Burling-Mercer, call us at 609-883-8188 or visit us on Facebook @ "Visiting Angels of Central Burlington & Mercer Counties".

¹ "Music Therapy Helps Alzheimer's Patients" by Jane Vail. Reuters Health, January 28, 2000. <http://www.afn.org/~afn54735/music-t1.html>

² "What is Art Therapy." <http://www.arttherapy.org/aata-aboutus.html>

³ BBC News, Art Therapy for Alzheimer's. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/349579.stm>

⁴ Dr. Gayatri Devi. What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Alzheimer's Disease (2004).

Nora de Cárdenas, J.D., is the Co-Owner, Director of "Visiting Angels of Central Burlington & Mercer Counties". Visiting Angels provides non-medical home care to seniors, the convalescing, the disabled and to adults simply in need of occasional help. Our "Angels" help make it possible for seniors to "age in place"... safely and comfortably. Visiting Angels' services also allow families to spend more mutually rewarding and meaningful time with their loved ones and provide peace of mind to those who face the challenges of long-distance caregiving.

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Local New Jersey Art Therapy Resources:

Looking for something to do locally to get you and your loved one started in Arts Therapy?

New Jersey Performing Arts Center has a toolkit for sale called "Creativity Matters: The Arts & Aging Toolkit": <http://www.artsandaging.org>

Caldwell College's Annual Art Therapy Conference in April 2010:
Email njata@verizon.net for info

Find a local Art Therapist:
<http://tinyurl.com/yf4897o>

Find a local Music Therapist:
<http://tinyurl.com/yhafpfh>

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