Reasons to Appreciate Your Job as a Caregiver

Precious Moments
Like life, caregiving is full of ups and downs. They may be few and far between, but when special moments come along, they make your heart sing. A moment of recognition from a loved one with dementia, a heartfelt “thank you” from someone who is usually ornery, a long-lost family story and a shared laugh are all treasures for caregivers to cherish. These highpoints can also act as fuel to keep you chugging along if you let them. Looking back on your caregiving journey, you will remember those tender moments.

You are Forever Changed
Caregiving changes your perspective on life. You are forever changed. Realize what is important in life. Nothing is meaningless during this time. Even under the most challenging circumstances, taking care of someone you love can transform your life forever.

Making a Difference
Never underestimate the impact you have on others. Always remember: you are making a difference in someone’s life every day. As in all areas of life, when we peel away the emotions attached to a situation, everything has a reason and its place in the grand scheme of things. The decision to choose love over self, to show mercy, to choose quality over quantity of life, to choose to let go rather than opting for heroics, to send the nonverbal message that "I am here and you are not alone"...these things are the ultimate love. It is the absence of self. You are part of something bigger than yourself. Celebrate it. Embrace it.

Adapted from article by Marlo Sollitto, agingcare.com
It is common for persons with Alzheimer’s disease to experience loss of bladder and/or bowel control. This can be caused by many factors, including medications, stress, a physical condition, the environment, even the person’s clothing. If incontinence is a new problem, consult your doctor to rule out potential causes such as a urinary tract infection, weak pelvic muscles, or medications. If the problem continues, try to:

**Provide Visual Cues –**

Keep the bathroom door open so the toilet is visible. Use nightlights to illuminate the bedroom and bathroom. Signs may assist an individual in finding the bathroom. A colored toilet lid may help it stand out. Avoid having items nearby that can be mistaken for a toilet, such as a laundry basket, plant pots or a trash can.

**Monitor Incontinence –**

Identify when accidents occur and plan accordingly. For example, if they happen every two hours, get the person to the bathroom before that time.

Additionally, always ensure that a bathroom visit is made before leaving and upon returning home. To help control incontinence at night, limit the intake of liquids after dinner and in the evening.

**Remove Obstacles –**

Remove throw rugs that may cause a person to trip and fall. Make sure clothing is easy for the individual to pull up and down or remove.

**Provide Reminders –**

People with Alzheimer’s often forget they need to use the bathroom.

Encourage the person by using familiar words and cues. Also watch for visible signs such as restlessness or facial expressions that may indicate the person needs to use the bathroom.

**Be Supportive –**

Help the person with Alzheimer’s retain a sense of dignity despite incontinence problems. A reassuring attitude will help lessen feelings of embarrassment.

Adapted from [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org).
How to Protect Elders From Frigid Winter Weather

Chilling temperatures and treacherous snow and ice can be hazardous for the elderly and their caregivers during the winter months. Here are a few things to keep in mind to help keep seniors safe during the frigid season:

**Hypothermia**—Each year, half of Americans who die from hypothermia are at least 65 years old. The elderly are particularly susceptible to becoming dangerously chilled because they have less fat, slower circulation and a more sluggish metabolism. A senior can even become hypothermic while indoors, so the thermostat should never be set below 65 degrees for a person who is 75 or older. Make sure that an elderly person is warmly dressed when inside the house as well as outside.

**Dehydration**—Seniors are especially prone to becoming dehydrated simply because they eat and drink less than younger people, thus they consume less water. In general, people also feel less thirsty during the winter and therefore are more prone to not drinking as much as they should. Make sure your elderly loved one is drinking consistently.

**Ice and snow**—Sidewalks slick with ice and snow pose a serious falling hazard for an elderly person. Make sure that the porch, driveway, sidewalk, etc. of the senior has been thoroughly cleaned. Try not to let them do it themselves—bring a shovel or hire an outside service. To maximize a senior’s stability, be sure that they have rubber-soled shoes and new treads on their walker or cane.

**Disaster kit**—Winter storms can be fierce enough to knock down power lines and forcibly confine seniors to their homes. It is essential to make sure a senior is equipped with a disaster kit to help them get through these times. Each kit should include at minimum a week’s supply of food and water, a few days’ worth of medication for the senior, a flashlight, a weather radio, extra batteries, and first-aid essentials.

**Space heaters**—While they can provide an elderly person with some much needed warmth during the colder months, precautions need to be taken so these sources of heat don't become health hazards. If the heater is gas powered, make sure the senior has a fully functional carbon monoxide detector. If the heater is electric, make sure the cords aren't damaged or fraying. Keep all heaters away from flammable materials such as cloth and paper and make sure the smoke detector is working properly.

**Clothing**—Mittens, scarves, sweaters, hats, and coats are a few of the must-have articles of clothing for seniors living in colder climates. Even when an elderly person is indoors, they should be dressed in warm layers so they can take clothes off if they are too hot, or put more on if they are too cold.

Adapted from article by Anne-Marie Botek, agingcare.com
Five Tips for Avoiding Mealtime Misery

Mealtime can be a trying time for an older person and his/her caregiver. Here's a list of five common mealtime problems and how to try to deal with them:

**Anger and agitation** - Cognitive decline, whether it is dementia-related, or just a by-product of getting older may cause a senior to become agitated during mealtimes. Maintaining a calm demeanor may help them relax as well.

**Anxiety and confusion** - Anxiety and confusion can be avoided by making the eating process as straightforward as possible. Keep the dining space clean, well-lit and free of clutter.

**No appetite** - Advanced age and some medications can decrease a senior's appetite or impair their ability to taste food. Consult with an elderly person's doctor if you suspect that their medications are making them less inclined to eat. You can also try enhancing the flavor of foods with things like vinegar, onions, garlic, or olive oil.

**Problems chewing** - Things like ill-fitting dentures, tooth loss, and mouth sores can make it difficult for seniors to chew their food. Feeding them soft foods can help solve this problem. You can substitute canned fruits and vegetables for fresh produce. Things like eggs and peanut butter can replace harder sources of protein.

**Choking** - The muscles in an elderly person's esophagus are not as strong as they used to be so it will be harder for them to swallow larger amounts of food without choking. Chopping or shredding their food can help. Also, fruit smoothies made with protein powder will give them important nutrients while reducing the strain on their digestive systems.

Adapted from article by Anne-Marie Botek, agingcare.com.

Possible Causes of Poor Appetite

- **Not recognizing food.** The person may no longer recognize the foods you put on his or her plate.
- **Poor fitting dentures.** Eating may be painful, but the person may not be able to tell you this. Make sure dentures fit and visit the dentist regularly.
- **Medications.** New medications or a dosage change may affect appetite. If you notice a change, call the doctor.
- **Not enough exercise.** Lack of physical activity will decrease appetite. Encourage simple exercise, such as going for a walk, gardening or washing dishes.
- **Decreased sense of smell and taste.** The person with dementia may not eat because food may not smell or taste as good as it once did.

Source: alz.org, Food, Eating and Alzheimer’s
Online and Telephone Support Options for Caregivers

For virtual community events and support:

- See front page for info about ADS online Support Groups
- Call 901-372-4585 to talk to an ADS Social Worker on the phone
- alzfdn.org
- alztennessee.org
- or call 24/7 Helpline: 800-259-4283

Tips for the Month of January

- Baking cookies is a fun part of the holidays. Involve your loved one in mixing, rolling, cutting out, sprinkling - and, of course, sampling.

- A hug is the best form of communication. Also a massage or back rub can be very satisfying to your loved one. A pleasing voice and a gentle touch will go a long way in helping her feel secure and safe. Remember skin sensitivity changes with dementia, so don’t hug too tightly and make sure your touch is always soft and loving.

- Loss of independence is hard for anyone. Your loved one is gradually losing some of his. You may feel you are, too. Even though at times it might not seem like it, you still have control over yours. You may find yourself having to restructure certain aspects of your life, but make sure you maintain some interests and activities of your own.

- Dementia decreases the ability to comprehend the purpose of an object. Words alone don’t always make sense. It helps to see things. Showing someone an action is often more effective than words. It may help to quietly model what you do with an object. Your loved one will be grateful to watch you so he can copy you. This can be most helpful at mealtime.

- Keep a list of people to call on for help. Make a record of the help you accepted and note the results. Provide literature about Alzheimer’s to those who help out so that they are familiar with what you are experiencing. This caring network will help you and your loved one stay close to family and friends.

- Without realizing it, your loved one may develop a grip that is uncomfortable for you. She has no control over the amount of strength she exerts. When she clutches your hand or arm too tightly, try putting a tennis ball or small stuffed animal in her hand.

Adapted from: Lyn Roche, Coping with Caring, Elder Books, 1996
Dealing with Disorientation: Using a “Reminder Board”

In The 36-Hour Day (which is a wonderful resource book), Nancy Mace and Peter Rabins note that an awareness of time is one of the first losses experienced by someone who has dementia. They explain that the initial loss of short-term memory means that the person with a dementia such as Alzheimer’s Disease has no memory of the events that have been experienced that day. This lack of awareness quickly leads to disorientation. My mom is a good example. She often is confused about which meal she is having; she’s completely forgotten about going to physical therapy in the morning or playing bingo in the afternoon. Mom no longer has any concept of what day of the week it is, much less the month or the season.

To help her try to have some orientation, I have adapted an idea that came from the hospital where Mom was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease. I’ve purchased an erasable white board and have hung it right by Mom’s bed where she can easily see it. I then try to write information that will help Mom remain oriented. On a daily basis I will change the date and the day of the week. This board provides a place for Mom to look to know that it’s Wednesday, May 3. Looking at this white board’s visual cues is now part of Mom’s daily routine.

Because the board has become such an integral part of Mom’s life, I also write other important information, such as when her next visit to the day center will be or if she has an upcoming appointment for a haircut.

The possibilities are endless!

Adapted from: www.healthcentral.com, Dealing with Disorientation, by Dorian Martin

Caregivers’ New Year’s Resolutions

In this new year, I will.........

Learn to take one hour out of each day just for myself to read, enjoy a hot bath, journal my thoughts or call a friend.

Attend at least one caregiver support group to realize that I am not alone and that I can learn from others.

See my doctor for a physical exam and give my own health needs more priority.

Eat a balanced diet and exercise at least 20 minutes three times a week even if all I can do is walk around the house, up and down the stairs or exercise from a chair.

Seek out one new resource to support my caregiver role such as chore services, housekeeping, home care programs or delivered meals.

Try to find a way to laugh or find humor in the day amidst the sadness or discouragement I may feel.

Reach out to my family and friends to help with my loved one. Finally, by focusing on these resolutions, I will be able to reap the rewards of caregiving, maintain balance in my life and provide care longer for my loved one.

Adapted from article by Kristine Dwyer, caregiver.com

Alzheimer’s Foundation of America’s VIRTUAL EVENTS

For Caregivers and Loved Ones:
Music, Art, Fitness, Meditation and more!

Go to alzfdn.org/events to view the calendar and find details.
Activities at ADS

Both centers were beautifully decorated by “Friends” and staff for the holiday season. (It’s always a little sad to take the decorations down and put them away.)

The Christmas parties, filled with food, fun and excitement, included “Christmas Bingo,” “Family Feud Holiday Trivia,” “Pin the Star on the Tree,” Christmas Carol sing-alongs, and painting baked dough holiday shape cut-outs. As always, everyone enjoyed the live entertainment, care of Creative Aging. Eggnog and holiday cookies were yummy!!

We are looking forward to the New Year, and our Football parties, which will be the special event at the centers in January, when “Friends” can enjoy snacks and non-alcoholic beer while watching an old Super Bowl. “Friends” are encouraged to wear jerseys to the party. Look out for further details.

Football Super Bowl Party
Friday, January 29, 2021 at both Centers
“Friends” are encouraged to wear Sports jerseys

A very special thank you to all caregivers, family members, and board members for the kind donations to our centers and for all the wonderful treats for our staff to enjoy!

Warmest wishes to everyone for a Happy New Year!

Remember happiness isn’t about perfection—it’s about having realistic expectations. We all have room to adjust our expectations to more closely match reality, and that change alone can help us have a happier and more productive year.

Excerpt from 13 new Year’s Resolutions for Caregivers, by Carol Bradley Bursack, agingcare.com
ALZHEIMER'S PATIENT'S PRAYER

Pray for me I was once like you.
Be kind and loving to me that's how I would have treated you.
Remember I was once someone's parent or spouse; I had a life and a dream for the future.

Speak to me,
I can hear you even if I don't understand what you are saying.
Speak to me of things in my past of which I can still relate.
Be considerate of me, my days are such a struggle.
Think of my feelings because I still have them and can feel pain.
Treat me with respect because I would have treated you that way.
Think of how I was before I got Alzheimer's; I was full of life,
I had a life, laughed and loved you.

Think of how I am now,
My disease distorts my thinking, my feelings, and my ability to respond,
but I still love you even if I can't tell you.
Think about my future because I used to.
Remember I was full of hope for the future just like you are now.
Think how it would be to have things locked in your mind and can't let them out. I need you to understand and not blame me, but Alzheimer's.

I still need the compassion and the touching and most of all....
I still need you to love me.
Keep me in your prayers because I am between life and death.
The love you give will be a blessing from God and both of us will live forever.

How you live and what you do today will always be remembered in the heart of the Alzheimer's Patient.

Adapted from poem written by Carolyn Haynali, www.nccdp.org