

alzheimer's  association®

if you have alzheimer's disease

What you should know,
what you should do



the compassion to care, the leadership to conquer®

what is happening to me?

Alzheimer's disease causes gradual, irreversible changes in the brain. These changes usually cause problems with memory, decision making and self care.

The disease also affects the ways we communicate — both in expressing our thoughts and in understanding what others are saying. You may be worried or anxious about the changes you've noticed so far.

While there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, treatments might help you with some of your symptoms. And having information about the disease can help you cope.

**We're here for you,
all day, every day**

800.272.3900
alz.org



It's important to know that:

- The changes you are experiencing are because of the disease.
- You will have good days and bad days.
- The disease affects each person differently, and symptoms will vary.
- Trying different ideas will help you find comfortable ways to cope.
- Some suggestions may work for you, and others may not.
- You are not alone — more than 5 million Americans have Alzheimer's.
- People who understand what you're going through can help you and your family.

The Alzheimer's Association offers suggestions to make things easier. Inside, you'll find help for questions such as:

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1. what can i do?

Coping with memory loss

While you may clearly remember things that happened long ago, recent events can be quickly forgotten.

You may have trouble keeping track of time, people and places. You may forget appointments or people's names. It might be very frustrating trying to remember where you put things.

Suggestions for coping with memory loss:

- Keep a book with you at all times that has:
 - ◆ Important telephone numbers and addresses, including emergency numbers and your own contact information.
 - ◆ People's names and their relationships to you.
 - ◆ A to-do list of appointments.
 - ◆ A map showing where your home is.
 - ◆ Thoughts or ideas you want to hold on to.
- Label cupboards and drawers with words or pictures that describe their contents, such as dishes and silverware, or sweaters and socks.
- Get an easy-to-read, digital clock that displays the time and date, and keep it in a prominent place.
- Use an answering machine or voicemail to keep track of telephone messages.
- Post phone numbers in large print next to the telephone; include emergency numbers along with your address and a description of where you live.
- Have a dependable friend call to remind you about meal times, appointments and medication.
- Keep a set of photos of people you see regularly; label the photos with names and who each person is in relation to you.
- Keep track of the date by marking off each day on a calendar.
- Use pillboxes to help you organize your medication; pillboxes with sections for times of day — like morning and evening — can help remind you when you should take your pills.





Finding your way

Sometimes, things that were once familiar may now seem unfamiliar. A favorite place may not look the same. Or you might even get lost.

Suggestions for finding your way:

- Take someone with you when you go out.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Explain to others that you have a memory problem and need assistance.
- Enroll in MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return®, a 24-hour nationwide emergency response identification and support program that will reunite you with your family should you ever wander.
- Sign up for Alzheimer Association's Comfort Zone® — a Web-based location management service that ensures you and your family are always connected.

Doing daily tasks

You may find familiar activities more difficult. For example, you may have trouble balancing a checkbook, following a recipe or doing simple household repairs.

Suggestions for doing daily tasks:

- Give yourself a lot of time, and don't let others hurry you.
- Take a break if something is too difficult.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Arrange for others to help you with difficult tasks.
- Maintain a daily routine.

Over time, certain things may become too difficult for you to do at all. This is because of the disease. Do the best you can, and accept help when it's available.

Talking to others

You may have difficulty understanding what others are saying. You may have trouble finding the right words to express your thoughts.

Suggestions for talking to others:

- Take your time.
- Tell people you have difficulty with thinking, communicating and remembering.
- Consider with whom you will share your diagnosis — it's helpful for others to understand your condition.
- Ask the person to repeat a statement if you did not understand what was said.
- Find a quiet place to converse if loud noises or crowds are bothering you.



2. is what i'm feeling normal?

Living with the changes caused by Alzheimer's disease can bring about many unfamiliar emotions. These feelings are a natural response to the disease. It is important to share these reactions with others. Tell someone with whom you are comfortable how you feel.

Also, the Alzheimer's Association can refer you to a support group where you can meet others who are living with Alzheimer's.

You may find yourself saying:

"I worry more than usual."

It's important to talk to your family and friends about your concerns. You may worry about what's going to happen to you in the future. Or you may wonder how quickly the disease will progress.

While there are no definite answers to these questions, most people find that doing something they enjoy — like walking or gardening — helps them take their mind off their worries.

“I sometimes think I’m going crazy.”

The disease can make you feel as if you are losing control. Telling those around you how you feel may give you comfort. Sharing your feelings with others who are living with Alzheimer's may also help.

“I sometimes get into a bad mood.”

It's normal to experience mood changes. On these days, it is important to remember that tomorrow could be a better day. Try to do things that will lift your spirits.

“Sometimes I feel angry.”

Feeling angry is natural. Sometimes being part of a support group or talking to a counselor who knows about Alzheimer's can help. Your doctor or local Alzheimer's Association office can refer you.

“I sometimes feel sad.”

You may feel sadness when faced with the changes that the disease brings to your life. It may help to spend time with friends or family, or to do something you enjoy. You might also consider consulting your doctor about medications that may help ease feelings of sadness.



It's normal to go through a range of emotions. You're facing many challenges and adjustments. The important thing is to find ways to cope with these feelings that make you feel better.

“When things go wrong, I feel really embarrassed.”

Getting lost, forgetting a once-familiar face or not being able to find the right word can feel embarrassing. But this is a part of the disease.

Explain to people that you have memory problems to help ease any awkward feelings. Keeping a sense of humor, whenever possible, can also be very helpful.

“I get so frustrated!”

Not being able to do the things you once did can be frustrating. Talk to others about why you are feeling this way. See if there is anything that you, or those around you, can do to make things easier.

“Sometimes I feel very lonely!”

You may think that the people around you do not understand what you're going through. It can be comforting to talk to others who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Your local Alzheimer's Association office can refer you to a support group.

“I feel guilty asking for help.”

Few of us like to ask others for help. We often resist relying on others. Over time, you will find it necessary to ask for help more often. Try to accept the help you need. Chances are that others will be pleased to be of assistance.



3. how else can i take care of myself?

Two of the most important ways to maintain your well-being are to stay healthy and safe.

Health

Take good care of your body.

Suggestions for your health:

- Rest when you are tired.
- Exercise regularly, with your doctor's approval.
- Eat properly.
- Cut down on alcohol — it can make your symptoms worse.
- Take your medications as prescribed, and ask for help if it is difficult to remember when they should be taken.
- Reduce stress in your daily life.



Safety

Memory problems, difficulties with decision making, and communication changes can all create new concerns about safety.

Suggestions for your safety:

■ *Consider a companion*

The person you live with may worry about leaving you alone for long periods of time. While you may feel you will be fine alone, having a companion can help the time pass more pleasantly. It can also lessen worry for those close to you.

■ *Stop driving when it's no longer safe*

Memory loss can hinder your ability to drive safely. You may also become less able to make decisions and react quickly. While it is not easy to give up your license, at some point it will no longer be safe for you to drive.

Look into other ways to get around, like friends, family, taxi cabs or public transportation.

Just as people can wander while walking, they can also become lost when driving or taking a bus, train or airplane. Some people wander hundreds of miles away from their homes. To help protect your safety, enroll in the Medic Alert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return® and Alzheimer's Association Comfort Zone® programs.

■ *Be mindful of electrical appliances*

Leave written reminders to yourself like, “turn off the stove” or “unplug the iron.” Be sure you have an automatic shut-off feature on the appliances you use most often — especially the ones that can cause harm if left unattended.

■ *Use smoke detectors*

Make sure your home has working smoke detectors. A smoke detector could save your life in a fire. Put a reminder in your calendar to change the battery.

■ *Be careful of people you don't recognize*

If someone you don't recognize comes to your door, don't let them in. Instead, write down the person's name and telephone number. Later, you or a family member can call the person.

4. what if i live on my own?

Many people with Alzheimer's continue to live successfully on their own during the early stages of the disease. Making simple adjustments, taking safety precautions and having the support of others can make things easier.

Suggestions for living on your own:

- Talk to staff at your local Alzheimer's Association office or your doctor about where to get help for things like housekeeping, meals and transportation.
- Inform your bank if you have difficulty with record-keeping and keeping track of your accounts; they may provide special services for people with Alzheimer's.
- Arrange for direct deposits of checks, such as your retirement pension or Social Security benefits.
- Plan for home-delivered meals if they are available in your community.
- Have a family member regularly sort your closet and dresser drawers to make it easier for you to get dressed.

- Leave a set of house keys with a neighbor you trust.
- Schedule family, friends or a community service to make a daily call or visit; keep a list of things to discuss.

At some point, living alone will become too difficult or dangerous. Make plans now for where you will live as the disease progresses. You may want to get a helpful roommate, live with relatives or move to a residential care setting.



5. what about the future?

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive illness, and the symptoms you're experiencing will gradually worsen. You will need more help. There is no way to predict how or when this will happen. It's a good idea for you to make decisions about your future as early in the course of the disease as possible.

Suggestions for future plans:

Make arrangements at work

- Talk to your employer about Alzheimer's disease and your symptoms. Take someone with you to help you explain and clarify your situation.
- Cut down on your hours or responsibilities if possible.
- If you own your own business, put plans in place for its future operations.

Consider future living arrangements

- Talk to your family or friends about where you want to live, and with whom, to prepare for the time when you will need more care.
- Consider all of the options available, including adult day programs, in-home care and hospice services.

Settle your money and legal matters

- Consider naming a person to make health care decisions for you when you are unable to do so; this person should know your wishes about your health care and future living arrangements.
- Make sure your money matters are in the hands of someone you trust, like your spouse or domestic partner, your child or a close friend.
- See a lawyer about naming a person to legally take care of your money matters when you can no longer do it.
- Take someone with you to the lawyer to help explain your situation and to help interpret what the lawyer says.
- Find out about any available options for long-term care insurance.

Planning ahead ensures that your future will be in good hands. It also helps those close to you make the right decisions for you in the future.



We're here for you, all day, every day

Our 24/7 Helpline offers:

- Confidential consultation by master's-level clinicians.
- Help provided in more than 140 languages and dialects.
- Referrals to community programs and services in your area.

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alz.org

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10 quick tips for living with alzheimer's

- 1** Carry with you a book of important notes and photos.
- 2** Enroll in Medic Alert[®] + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return[®] and Alzheimer's Association Comfort Zone[®].
- 3** Accept help from others.
- 4** Keep doing the things you most enjoy.
- 5** Talk to others who have Alzheimer's.
- 6** Find ways to laugh as often as you can.
- 7** Maintain your physical health.
- 8** Take steps to make your home safe.
- 9** Extend the time you can live safely in your home with help from your family, friends and community.
- 10** Put future plans in place now.

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The Alzheimer's Association is the world's leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health.

Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's disease.

For information and support,
contact the Alzheimer's Association:

800.272.3900
alz.org

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