

# 5 TIPS for caregivers

## MAINTAINING A SOCIAL NETWORK

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No matter the season, there's always something you'd like to get out to enjoy - the beautiful weather of spring, a crisp autumn breeze, or the warm summer sun! However if you're a caregiver, for many reasons you may not feel equipped to bring your loved one out into the community. Sometimes you don't even feel equipped at home! Here are 5 tips for maintaining a social network and helping you feel equipped in providing activity for your loved one.

### 1 Choose an appropriate activity – at home or outside.

Overall, activities should focus on how to make the person feel successful, and success can take many forms. Sometimes success is just pure enjoyment. Since many individuals with Alzheimer's retain long-term memories for much longer, consider hobbies they enjoyed in the past, and adapt to their current skill level. For example, if someone loved tending a garden, they may still be able to help you plant a flower pot with direction. Or bring in some exercise; take the person for a walk at a local park or botanical garden. You can talk about the wildlife you encounter on your walk. Success can also be making the person feel useful and valued. Have the person help fold laundry or sort socks. It doesn't matter what the end product looks like, as long as the person feels helpful and enjoyed the task.

### 2 Know their schedule.

Routine is extremely important for individuals with memory impairment. Sticking to the same daily routine helps maintain consistency, and keeps things familiar. However, this doesn't mean you have to do the exact same thing each day! If the person has more energy in the morning, consider using this time to take a walk, or for another form of exercise they enjoy. If they are more focused in the afternoon, this might be a good time for an art project, a puzzle, or a household chore like sorting socks. But adapt the schedule to their needs; if the person likes to sleep in, getting them up early for a walk at sunrise will make no one happy. Create

a schedule that works for them, and keep the same type of activity at a similar time each day, and you will all benefit from a consistent routine.

### 3 Let family and friends help.

Humans are naturally social. Maintaining a social network of friends and family will help you reduce isolation and burnout. Many of your close friends will offer to help – let them! Have a close friend take the person to lunch, or come over for an afternoon visit. Not only will your loved one enjoy the company, but this will provide you respite time for yourself; run an errand, meet a friend for coffee or even take a nap! If you've created a consistent schedule

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for the person, you can more easily have a friend help with the specific "activity" at that time. Your loved one can still participate in something familiar, and your friends and family will appreciate the specific direction in what will help both you and the person with Alzheimer's disease. And if your family and friends aren't willing to help out? Consider a respite volunteer. Fairfax County trains volunteers to spend time with individuals with memory impairment, still giving you a few hours to yourself.

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### 4 Consider the services of a geriatric care manager.

You may first be asking, what is a geriatric care manager? They act as a guide and advocate for families who are caring for older relatives or disabled adults, assisting the client in attaining their maximum functional potential. Geriatric care managers can assist with a variety of tasks, as needed, including: housing – helping families evaluate and select appropriate level of housing or residential options, home care services – determining types of services that are right for a client and assisting the family to engage and monitor those services, medical management – attending doctor appointments, facilitating communication between doctor, client, and family, social activities – providing opportunity for client to engage in social, recreational, or cultural activities that enrich the quality of life, and many others, such as legal, financial, safety, and family communication needs. If caregiving is becoming overwhelming, a geriatric care manager can help guide your family, and take over some tasks to make your caregiving job more manageable.

with an activity, it could be that they're actually just too hot, overly tired from something stimulating yesterday, or perhaps they need to use the restroom. Finally, the best laid plans can also be interrupted by family, work or school issues that need your immediate attention. Have a friend or family member that can be on stand-by, in case you have to step out to deal with an issue. Having back-up plans and friends to assist will help you go with the flow more easily.

### 5 Be prepared to go with the flow.

We all know that the best laid plans are just that – plans. The person you're caring for may simply not be interested in the activity you planned. Be prepared with alternate activities, to engage your loved one if they're not connecting to the current activity. Also remember to consider the person's health and environment. If they're not connecting



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