



At Arbor Springs we are dedicated to helping families manage the realities of dementia with as much love, dignity, and knowledge as possible. This monthly e-newsletter is our way of offering helpful tips and insights that will hopefully make your days with your loved one a little easier, happier, and calm.

As Alzheimer's disease progresses, your loved one will need more and more help with the seemingly simple activities of daily living (ADLs). To assist with these activities, caregivers need knowledge, skill, and patience.

One area that can be difficult for people with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia is getting dressed independently. Getting dressed can be a very complex and overwhelming task because there are so many steps involved. Mild dressing problems, such as choosing mismatched clothing, often begin towards the end of the early stages of dementia. Problems in the middle and late stages typically include a loss of the mental and physical ability to either choose clothing or physically dress oneself. Inappropriate undressing may also arise in the middle and latter stages of dementia.

While the task of dressing may become frustrating for a person with dementia, the tips below can help the process.

1. Simplify clothing choices. Empty the closet of clothes that are too difficult to put on or take off, and remove clothing that is not seasonably appropriate. Do not ask your loved one an open-ended question like, "What do you want to wear?" Rather, give your loved one an option of two outfits. Choose clothes with simple patterns and with solid contrasting colors as these tend to be easier for many people to see. Buy three or four sets of the same clothes if he/she wants to wear the same clothing every day.
2. Pick washable, comfortable clothing. Cardigans, shirts, and blouses that fasten in the front are easier than clothing that goes over the head. For some people, buttons, snaps, hooks, zippers, and belt buckles are too difficult to manage. These can be replaced with Velcro tape which can be purchased at any fabric store. Buy loose-fitting, stretchy clothing, such as cotton socks and underwear and sweat pants/skirts/shorts with elastic waistbands. Substitute cotton sports bras or camisoles in place of traditional bras. Try slip-on shoes that won't slide off or shoes with Velcro straps. Make sure shoes have non-skid soles. There are online companies such as Buck and Buck that sell affordable adaptive clothing and shoes.
3. Ensure the environment is conducive for the task of dressing. The room needs to be warm enough and there needs to be adequate lighting. Close the door and pull down the blinds to provide privacy.
4. Have a routine for dressing, including doing so at the same time each day, as well as

putting clothes on in the same order each day. Lay out clothing in the order that each item should be put on, i.e. underwear first, then pants, then a shirt, then a sweater.

5. Allow ample time for your loved one to do as much of the task as possible by himself/herself. Gentle prompting or reminding may be all that is needed in the early stages of dementia. Eventually you will need to break the task into simple, manageable steps and doing them one step at a time. You may have to gently remind him/her with each step, or do several of the steps yourself. Reassurance and praise for each successful step will make the task more pleasurable for both of you.
6. Remain calm. Some people with dementia may undress themselves frequently. The individual no longer understands what is appropriate, and is usually not doing this to be provocative. Evaluate whether the individual is too warmly dressed, needs to go to the bathroom, is tired and trying to get ready for bed, or is bored? Is clothing too tight or the fabric scratchy? Is the individual's skin dry and itchy? If she removes her clothing in a socially inappropriate location, don't raise your voice or become upset. Instead, ask for her help in the bathroom or offer to help her get that button done up. If you remain calm, she will most likely be better able to understand your request and perhaps comply. If you react strongly and quickly reach over into her space to cover her up, she's more likely to become agitated and combative.
7. Remind yourself that you need to let go of any embarrassment you might feel. Your loved one may wear non-matching clothes or he/she may forget to put on a piece of clothing. He/she may put on many layers of clothing since his/her judgment and the sensation of hot and cold can be impaired. If extra clothes are not causing any discomfort it is easier to leave well alone. Always try to focus on the fact that he or she was able to get dressed.

Activities of daily living (ADLs) are often perceived as mundane and "easy." Getting dressed is a task that most of us are able to take for granted. As dementia progresses, dressing can be an area where your loved one tries to maintain his independence. When this ability begins to decrease, he may cling to it despite the difficulties, as a way to make his own choices. If a certain outfit is mismatched but your father loves it and feels confident in it, learn to let it go and be thankful for his enjoyment of it.

If you have specific questions that you would like answered in an upcoming issue of this e-newsletter please reach out to Monica Kuehl, RN, BSN, Director of Marketing/Admissions at m.kuehl@arborsprings.org or at 515-223-1135 and I'll do my best to get to them all.