Helping Children Understand Dementia

Dementia, in its many forms (including Alzheimer’s), can be a complex condition that is hard for adult family members and friends to understand. For young children and teens, these changes in an aging family member can be even more difficult to understand.

When a child lives with a family member with dementia, or sees him regularly, the changes of dementia seem gradual. A caregiver may have many opportunities to explain to the child the odd behaviors that occur. When a child sees the aging family member only rarely, the behavior changes may seem dramatic and scary.

Children younger than schoolage tend to personalize and feel responsible for the things that happen around them. They may think that something they said to Grandma caused her personality to change. Explain in words they understand that dementia is a disease and no one caused it. They may also fear that, since dementia is a disease, they or someone else might catch it. Again, explain that we don’t yet understand why dementia affects some people, usually when they are older, but it is not contagious.

Young children often need help putting their feelings into words. You can prompt them by...
saying something like, “Sometimes Grandpa scares me a little when he shouts. Does that scare you too?” Other typical emotions include anxiety, sadness, embarrassment, and guilt.

Try to prepare young children for the behavior changes that will likely come with dementia. When Grandpa does or says something bizarre, frightening or hurtful, explain that the sickness is changing the way that Grandpa’s brain thinks – and he can’t control it. Assure the child that Grandpa still loves him but his brain is sick.

Schoolage children are able to understand more of the details of dementia. As with younger children, reassure schoolagers that they did nothing to cause this situation. A librarian may suggest age-appropriate books that help schoolagers relate to kids like them in similar situations. Your schoolager may also want to draw pictures or write stories about how he’s feeling about the changes in Grandma.

Teens can understand even more about dementia but may be less willing to talk about it. They have likely seen media coverage of dementia but may be unprepared for the specific changes in Grandma.

Teens may put on a brave face but be struggling to understand and cope. It may help to open up about your own concerns and reinforce how important it is for the family to work together in this situation.

Teens may be mature enough to be able to help care for an aging family member, so helping them be prepared is even more important. You may have a local Alzheimer’s support group that could help with information as well as emotional support.

**Resources**

**Prince Dies Without a Will**

According to a USA Today article, the famous singer, song writer, and performer, Prince, died intestate. Intestate means he died without a will. It is estimated that Prince’s estate is worth approximately $300 million. Your estate may not be worth as much as Prince’s, but you probably still need a will.

Some Americans think that only wealthy individuals (e.g., celebrities, professional athletes, etc.) need
wills, but the truth is a will should be created by anyone who meets the required age limit, owns assets, and wants to determine who receives their assets after their death. Dying without a valid will can cause emotional and financial headaches by those left behind after your death regardless of the value of your estate, so it is important to create a will and other important estate planning documents.

A will allows you to decide, before your death, who you want to receive your assets upon your death. It also allows you to name an executor, the person who manages and oversees the distribution of your assets. A will should meet the legal requirements in the state in which you reside.

When a person dies intestate (without a valid will), state intestate laws govern how and to whom property is distributed. You can also die intestate when you have a written will as it can be invalid if you got married, had a child, or adopted a child, but didn’t update your will after these life-changing circumstances. When a person dies intestate, it usually takes longer to settle their estate. You will do your family a huge favor by creating a will and updating it when needed.

Fights over an estate not only pull families apart, but they have the potential to waste a large amount of the assets in your estate on legal fees. Do your loved ones a favor and plan properly to avoid family disagreements. Don’t make any more excuses about creating a will. While there are online resources for creating wills, it is best to get a lawyer to write one for you to avoid any pitfalls.


Nutrition

Staying Hydrated for Health

The summer in the South means barbecues and baseball, but it can also mean danger for older adults. As we age, it’s harder for our bodies to maintain a healthy internal temperature when the temperature outdoors rises. Chronic conditions and medications can make this worse. Being hot isn’t just about comfort. Heat-related illness can result in injury and even death if left untreated. People age 65 and older are at higher risk for heat-
related illness, and people aged 85 and older are at highest risk for heat-related death. Staying hydrated and knowing the signs of heat-related illness can help protect you during the warm summer months.

It is important to drink plenty of fluids all year long, but particularly in the summer months. Older adults may not feel thirsty as frequently, so drink often. Small sips throughout the day can help. Water is the best choice for hydration, but other non-alcoholic beverages will work too. If you sweat a lot, a sports drink with electrolytes like sodium and potassium may be helpful. These drinks are designed to be easily used by the body. But remember: sports drinks have sugar and calories. If you are watching your weight, use them sparingly. Fruits and some vegetables are great sources of water. The summer melons you love like watermelons, cantaloupe, and honeydew are great choices to help you stay hydrated and get the vitamins and minerals you need. Many vegetables have lots of water, like lettuces, peppers, tomatoes, and cucumbers. If your doctor tells you to limit your fluid intake because of a chronic condition or medication, talk to him/her about the best way to stay hydrated while following these orders.

Knowing the signs of heat-related illness can save lives. Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness, and can result in death or disability. Heat exhaustion is a less severe, but still problematic. The signs of heat exhaustion can vary, but may include dizziness, headache, paleness, muscle cramps, nausea or vomiting, heavy sweating, fast and shallow breathing. Body temperature higher than 103°F, red, hot, dry skin without sweating, throbbing headache, dizziness, and nausea are signs of possible heat stroke. Because heat stroke is so dangerous, call for help immediately if you think you or someone you know is suffering from heat-related illness.

So drink your fluids and eat your fruits and veggies to stay well during these hot summer days. Check on your older friends and family, and when in doubt, call for help!
Refreshings Watermelon Salad

Cook time: 25 minutes
Makes: 8 servings (1 cup servings)

6 cups fresh watermelon, cut into cubes
2 cucumbers
2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint or basil leaves (or ¼ teaspoon dried)
¼ cup crumbled feta cheese ½ tablespoon olive oil
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
2 teaspoons olive oil
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
¼ teaspoon salt

Directions
1. Roughly chop cucumber into small pieces (~1/2 inch dice).
2. In a large bowl, combine watermelon, cucumber, feta cheese, onions and herbs. Stir to combine.
3. Season with salt and pepper. Drizzle olive oil and balsamic vinegar over the mixture. Stir to combine.

Serve chilled.
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