



Take Charge of Household Chores

THE SITUATION

The importance of a clean and orderly home cannot be overstated; after all, they do say, “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” While it can be easy for caregivers to literally get swept up in responsibilities related to caregiving, keeping up with household chores is not only self-satisfying but crucial to the health of everyone who lives under your roof, including you and your loved one with Alzheimer’s disease. Your loved one’s loss of short-term memory, reduced motor skills and confusion may impact his or her ability to do the same tasks around the house as in the past. That could put even more on your plate. However, there are steps you both can take to get household chores under control.

THE SOLUTION

- **Assess household responsibilities.** Caregivers should constantly assess their loved one’s capabilities to figure out who can be doing what. It’s important to recognize that there are still many meaningful things people with the disease can do to pitch in around the house and feel like a valuable contributor to the household. Determine how much the individual is capable of accomplishing; which tasks would be safer and more effective with some supervision or guidance; and which chores caregivers or other members of the household need to take on. Then, divide and conquer!
- **Select appropriate tasks.** Housekeeping chores offer an opportunity to build on remaining strengths so involve your loved one in safe and simple housekeeping tasks that are enjoyable and provide mental and physical stimulation. For example, depending on the stage of the disease, your loved one might be able to fold laundry, wash or dry dishes, set the table, sweep the floor, polish shoes, sort mail, clip coupons, and sort recycling materials or other things. Offer step-by-step instructions and positive reinforcement.
- **Be flexible.** Since your loved one’s needs will increase as Alzheimer’s disease progresses, re-evaluate your schedule every so often to determine any necessary changes. For example, you might have to do laundry more frequently if your loved one loses bladder and/or bowel control.

- **Remove clutter.** A clutter-free environment limits the risk of falls and other injuries for people with dementia, who are already at greater risk due to symptoms of the disease. Also as a result of the disease, your loved one might stockpile food, papers or other items so be on the lookout and address this issue with healthcare professionals since hoarding behavior can result in infestation as well as increase the risk of injury.
- **Keep room layouts intact.** When cleaning the house, be sure to leave furniture and other objects in the same arrangement as before since changing the layout can be disorienting and cause accidents.
- **Lock up dangerous household items.** Store toxic cleansers and other housekeeping materials in a secure place that is inaccessible to the person with dementia.
- **Hire someone to help with chores.** Consider cleaning and errand runner services if financially doable. Also, a home attendant or personal care attendant is a trained professional who can assist with basic housekeeping functions, such as sweeping and washing dishes, in addition to helping with personal care needs, such as dressing and bathing. There may also be programs in your community that offer assistance with household chores or caregiving tasks.
- **Give yourself a break.** While you might have given your house the white glove treatment beforehand, recognize now that you may not have the same time or strength to devote to household chores. As long as the environment doesn’t pose a health risk, it’s okay to prioritize and settle for less.

— WRITTEN BY JESSIE MCHEFFEY

PREPARE IN ADVANCE

Creating a calendar for household chores can help keep track of both completed and to-do tasks. Marking your loved one’s household contributions on the calendar can instill a sense of pride and accomplishment.