

# New Caregiver Checklist



## Learn about the disease, condition, or injury.

- Talk to your loved one's primary care physician and specialists. Ask some of the following questions:
  - What are the person's specific care needs?
  - How will these needs change over time?
  - What are the risks associated?
  - What are ways to prevent/manage various symptoms?
  - What are the treatment options?
  - How will the disease progress?
- Many diseases have specific organizations that offer resources and free educational workshops.
- Research information from the internet, books, and pamphlets.
- Join a caregiver support group (one specifically related to the disease if available). Online and in-person groups offer information from others who are living through caring for someone with the disease.

## Plan for the immediate care.

- Ask your loved one about his or her wishes regarding immediate care.
- Adapt the living environment for special needs
  - Are rooms and hallways adequately lit? Are nightlights necessary?
  - Do the bathrooms have grab bars, bath benches, raised toilet seats, handheld shower heads, non-slip bath mats, etc.?
  - Does your loved one need/have a cane, wheelchair, walker or commode?
  - Are living areas and hallways free of fall hazards (such as rugs, extension cords, or clutter)?
  - Are there adequate methods to access emergency services if necessary (emergency button bracelet, pull cords, phone service, appropriate supervision)?



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- “File of Life”- A magnetized folder that attaches to the refrigerator door with important medical and contact information.
- Designate a substitute caregiver in the event you are unavailable. Keep important and updated caregiving instructions readily available.
- Include other family members or friends. Online calendars that can be accessed and shared are useful, or designate someone to be in charge of scheduling care. Make sure roles and tasks are discussed and agreed upon. It is important to be honest and upfront about what is realistic and what is not for you, your family, and your loved one.
- Consider future legal decisions and designations. Consider speaking with a financial planner or elder law attorney.

## **Research all community resources and options.**

- Practice organization and good record keeping (for now and later).
  - Keep a journal
  - Make copies of all important documentation. Make sure private information is properly stored.
- Contact the hospital staff and social worker about local services.
- Speak with local community agencies such as Aging Service Access Points. Some of the services these agencies will be able to discuss and assist with include:
  - In-home services (for personal care, supervision, homemaking)
  - Home delivered meals
  - Adult Day Health centers
  - Transportation
  - Managing finances
  - Options about various state benefits
  - Protective services
  - Case management and resources about benefits
- Reach out to your local Council on Aging about finding out what resources and services are available in your town.
- Contact your town hall and Veteran’s Association to discuss potential benefits.

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## For memory loss or confusion:

- Speak with your loved one's primary care physician about having a comprehensive evaluation done by a neurologist or neuropsychiatrist to identify what is causing the problem.
- When someone has a memory impairment, the executive functioning and ability to make safe decisions may be impacted. Some diseases, such as dementia, are progressive and the person's memory will continue to get worse. As early as possible, consult with your loved one, physicians, and family members about how financial management tasks will be delegated, how a driver's license will be handled, how medication will be managed, and who will be designated to advocate for health related decisions.
- Wandering can sometimes be prevented by adding bells to doors, hiding doors with a curtain, covering locks or doorknobs, or placing a black mat in front of the door. Consider adding locks to windows and basement doors.
- Make sure digital clocks are easily accessible. Upon leaving, write notes with an actual return time instead of time length (like minutes or hours).
- Register with MedicAlert +Safe Return- A nationwide registration and identification program.  
<http://www.alz.org/care/dementia-medic-alert-safe-return.asp>
- Register your loved one with the local police department. Keep a current photograph available of what he or she looks like now.
- Alzheimer's/Dementia Coaching Services- Beverly Moore and Associates. Beverly specializes in teaching skills to safely manage Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. (617) 328-3440  
<http://www.stilmee.com/>
- Massachusetts Alzheimer's Association can provide information, education, and support for families and people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. <http://alz.org/manh/>