



Alzheimer's Care: 5 Action Steps Family Caregiver Should Take

By Todd A. Shetter, Chief Operating Officer of ActivCare Living

Family caregivers of those with Alzheimer's or related dementia have many issues to manage. Sometimes it is difficult to determine next steps and develop a caregiving plan. ActivCare, a San Diego-based, memory care pioneer, solicited advice from local geriatricians, geropsychiatrists, professional care managers and elder law attorneys, asking for their critical steps for family caregivers to follow. From these experts' input, a priority list was developed outlining the essential steps every caregiver should follow. Redirection is the simple act of acknowledging and distracting in order to redirect focus to a more productive or safer topic or activity.

If you care for a loved one with Alzheimer's or dementia and you do nothing else, take these five action steps.

Step 1: Establish legal responsibility. Create legal documents that will be helpful to you and to your loved one. Establish your legal rights to make decisions on behalf of your loved one and make sure that there is someone legally designated to do this for you. This includes creating Powers of Attorney for health care and finances for your loved one and for yourself.

Step 2: Get a second opinion. Always seek more than one medical opinion on diagnosis and an established course of medication treatment. Obtain a comprehensive, professional geriatric cognitive assessment to determine a baseline functioning level, and have it explained in detail.

Step 3: Care for yourself. A healthy, rested caregiver is an effective caregiver. Consider your typical weekly schedule, and look for concrete ways that family/friends could help you. Determine what tasks can be delegated and ask for help.

Step 4: Join a support group. Support, advice and an empathetic ear from those who have taken a similar path and can understand challenges are essential to the family caregiver. Explore the possibility of a support group for your loved one, too, if they are in the early stages of the disease.

Step 5: Plan for the future. Alzheimer's and related dementias are progressive diseases. Do research and know what lies ahead to plan accordingly. Register a loved one with MedicAlert/Safe Return (national) and the Take Me Home registry (in SD County). Become familiar now with the in-home and residential-based resources that you may need to access in the future. Don't wait until a crisis to learn what's available, educate yourself.

The caregiver journey rarely has a road map. However, taking these action steps can help prepare for the challenges ahead and afford a more rewarding experience.

About ActiCare

ActiCare Living develops and manages residential memory care communities designed to enhance the lives of those with memory loss. With locations in Carlsbad, Chula Vista, Long Beach, Pacific Beach and coming soon to 4S Ranch, ActiCare's specialized assisted living communities, activity programs, experienced staff and compassionate care are purpose-built to meet the special needs of those with Alzheimer's or related dementia. For more information about ActiCare Living and its communities, please contact (888) MEM-LOSS or visit activcareliving.com.