

ASSISTED LIVING SAFETY: DEMENTIA PATIENT AND ADLS

INTRODUCTION

Assisting elderly adults with activities of daily living (ADLs) is an especially hard task when the elderly adult suffers from dementia. Dementia is a condition that causes a person to lose the memory they need to function normally and need help with ADLs. Sometimes, this memory loss can become so bad that the person may experience hallucinations, illusions, or even become violent and be a danger to their caregivers, so the caregivers must know how to keep themselves safe. In addition, caregivers must remember other tips so they can avoid illness and injury and be able to continue to help others.

HAZARDS

If you are taking care of dementia patients in your own facility, be sure to remove safety hazards. If you are caring for a dementia patient in a person's home, work with the homeowner to remove as many safety hazards as possible. Some of the safety hazards you may need to watch out for include (but are not limited to):

- Fires
 - If the patient smokes, monitor them while they are smoking.
 - Store ignition sources, such as matches or lighters, out of reach of the patient.
 - Consider storing other tools of smoking, such as ashtrays and cigarettes, out of sight of the patient- they may forget the desire to smoke altogether.
 - Keep lit candles away from the patient and consider not having them lit at all.
- Aquariums
 - Electrical pumping equipment, water, and glass are bad combinations for a curious dementia patient and those around him.
 - If you are in your own facility, consider not having an aquarium.
 - If you are caring for the patient in a home, keep the aquarium out of reach and possibly out of sight of the patient.
- Sharp objects and guns
 - Keep guns and sharp objects, such as knives or scissors, out of sight, out of reach, and locked up.
- Needles
 - Follow your company's safety procedures when using and disposing of needles.



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BE PREPARED

One of the most important things a caregiver can do to protect themselves and their patients is to be prepared:

- Make a list of all the things that could go wrong, such as accidents, violent outbursts, equipment malfunctions, or even natural disasters.
- Once you have made the list, create an action plan on what to do should that event occur.
- Gather together supplies and anything else you would need to enact your plans.
- Go over your plans frequently to make needed changes and to be sure you can remember them in an emergency.

VIOLENCE

Patients with dementia may no longer understand the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and may even experience hallucinations. This means that patients may become violent towards people around them. Some ways to deal with and prevent violence are to:

- Keep noise levels low.
- Reduce the patient's caffeine, sugar, and junk food intake.
- Develop routines to avoid agitation.
 - Tell the patient about changes to their routine in advance (such as doctor's appointments) and frequently remind them.
 - Build some sort of exercise into the patient's routine so they can burn off steam.
- Have snacks or activities on hand to distract the patient from violence.
- Know emergency numbers to call if the patient becomes too much for you to handle.
- Look for behavioral triggers so you can avoid violence in the future.



GENERAL SAFETY TIPS

- Be familiar with your company's safety plans and procedures.
- Never be afraid to ask for help if you fear for your safety or your patient's safety.
- Never work under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Use proper lifting techniques when lifting the patient or equipment.
 - Do not try to catch the patient if they fall; slow the fall instead by supporting the patient's weight on their forward leg or focus on protecting the patient's head

CONCLUSION

It is always important to keep in mind your own safety when working with a dementia patient. You cannot help others if you are injured, so be sure to take good care of yourself just like you take good care of your patient.