



The Alzheimer's Update

A Local Organization Helping Local Families

Spring 2020

Living Life Differently

BY RENEE BROWN HARMON, MD

COVID-19 has forced us all to find a way to live differently. We have never experienced this type of fear, anxiety, and isolation before. If you are caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia, your life was already stressful. Adding this new layer of extreme unease is really hard!

Although I am no longer caring for my husband, I have been imagining us in the scenes that are playing out now. I've viewed this mainly as a way to try to connect with the reality of caregivers and their loved ones at this time. It's been painful and upsetting to imagine what our lives would have been like had this virus appeared while he was experiencing dementia.

Consider doing some of your daily chores together—laundry, dishwashing, and pet care can be approached as a team. "Let's do it together."

I have a few ideas that might be helpful. Stick to a routine, modifying as necessary. Mealtime, nap, and bedtime routines should continue. And it's OK to increase time in front of the television, or have more naps. Caregiving now cannot and will not be the same as it was before the coronavirus entered your lives. Give yourself permission to do the best you can.

Some activities to try with your loved one include: taking walks, singing and dancing to favorite songs, taking a drive, working appropriate level jigsaw puzzles, looking through photo albums, or cooking simple meals or snacks together. Consider doing some of your daily chores together--laundry, dishwashing, and pet care can be approached as a team. "Let's do it together." Make telephone or video calls to friends and family. Maybe you could start a correspondence with greeting cards to friends and family. Getting the mail every day would be an adventure!

I know you won't be able to take your loved one to adult day care or respite care, so maybe you could incorporate some activities that your loved one enjoys there into your day. I think I would have tried to play some variation of balloon volleyball whenever possible.

If your loved one is in a memory care unit or nursing home, consider visiting your loved one through windows, and if that's not possible, ask the staff for their recommendations for staying in touch. Telephone and video calls might be possible.

Continue self-care. If you have paid or volunteer caregivers willing to continue care,

I recommend that you, as primary caregiver, get out of the house for a walk or a drive. Call a friend, read, journal. Continue to exercise, perhaps with an online class. Keep doing the things that bring you joy. It will relieve some of your stress.

Ask for help. During a time of crisis, people genuinely want to be of service. Consider asking a friend to bring a meal to you, or to do your grocery or pharmacy shopping, leaving the items on your porch. Have a restaurant deliver a meal for a special treat.

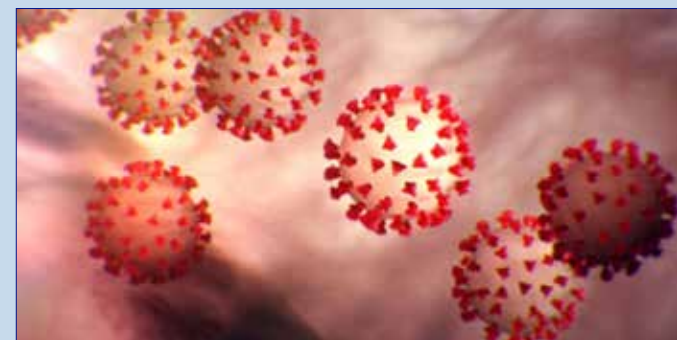
And this is hard. Consider what would happen if your loved one develops a serious illness, the coronavirus or something else. Not that I want you to panic and worry right now, but it always helped me to have a solid, logical plan, before anything actually happened. Alzheimer's disease is a fatal disease, so how far are you willing for medical care to go? Questions you might consider asking, if the need arises: What treatments might be available for in-home care, so that hospitalization might be avoided? Are you, as primary caregiver, or a paid professional caregiver, allowed to stay with your loved one if they are hospitalized? Consider writing a succinct summary of your loved one's medical history to give to staff if you're not allowed in.



We will get through this. It will be best if we get through this together, supporting each other. And perhaps some of the coping strategies you are now developing will serve you going forward.

Dr. Harmon husband, Harvey, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease at the age of 50. When Harvey was forced to retire, Renee assumed responsibilities for their shared medical practice and their home life. To channel her emotions and to record how Alzheimer's disease was affecting her husband, she began to write. As a physician and caregiver, her weekly blog is a wealth of information, inspiration, and support for other caregivers. Her website includes links to audio and video of some of her story-telling presentations, other pieces of writing. Visit: www.reneeharmon.com

ACA's response to Covid 19



Like all nonprofits, Alzheimer's of Central Alabama is grappling with our response to the pandemic. So much is out of our control. What is in our control is how we respond and the support we can continue to give the families on our service programs. ACA is continuing to offer services that make a real difference to families. Our families are among Alabama's most vulnerable. More than 50% have monthly incomes of \$1,000 or less. So for them our service programs are absolutely essential.

Alzheimer's doesn't have to isolate families living with the disease. ACA can help you stay connected!

ACA is continuing to provide Project Lifesaver bracelets for people at risk of wandering. Stay at home orders have no effect on the 50% of patients who will wander at some point during their illness. These bracelets are an important law enforcement tool for keeping people with dementia safe.

We are still providing support for families who had scholarships for their loved one to attend an adult day care center. As centers consider reopening, ACA is working to make certain that safe protocols are in place to protect both staff and participants. ACA is continuing to providing monthly continence supplies for families in 20 Alabama counties. We are partnering with government agencies and other nonprofits to identify families with Covid19-related financial difficulties who need help right now paying for continence supplies.

Because we know education is a family's first line of defense against Alzheimer's, ACA provides a weekly email/facebook post recapping current dementia-related events, activities, and research. For now our support group has become a forum for virtual interviews with local experts in dementia care.

Alzheimer's doesn't have to isolate families living with the disease. ACA can help you stay connected!



alzca.org



205.871.7970 or 866.806.7255



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Alzheimer's of Central Alabama

ACA's annual Garden Art Party would have been Mother's Day weekend. Instead we celebrated with a No Match for Mom campaign that continues through the end of May. Stay tuned as our fundraising effort evolve to meet our new reality. In the meantime, we are grateful to the companies and families that generously donated to the Garden Art Party!

P.S. Our community relations coordinator, Vance Holder turns 60 in July! Now that is a cause for celebration. Stay tuned for an opportunity to light all 60 candles on his cake! :

Garden Art Party

Corporate Partners:

Alabama Family Trust
Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Alabama
Brookdale University Park
Comfort Care Home Health & Hospice
Grandview Financial Group
Home Instead Senior Care
Kirkwood by the River
St. Martin's
Synovus
Visiting Angels
Warren Averett Asset Management

Garden Art Party event sponsors:

Presenting Sponsor: Anne and Mike Warren

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To us, it's personal



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Best Practices for Responding to Dementia Challenges

Redirect & Rechannel – A caregiver's biggest challenge is not reasoning, rationalizing or arguing. You won't win with those strategies, so don't try. Instead distract. Humor, a car ride, or snack all work some of the time. Sometimes you have to ride it out and trust that eventually they will move on to something else.

While reasoning creates doubt and fear, reassurance soothes and calms.

Reassess – Whenever you notice an abrupt change in your loved one's behavior, stop and consider possible physical causes. Like an infant, people with dementia

may not communicate their needs with words. When behaviors change you must be a detective. Maybe they are hungry or tired. Or maybe the behavior change and increased confusion are caused from a urinary infection. Out-of-the-ordinary behavior may have a physical cause.

Reconsider – Sometimes the problem is not with our loved one. The problem is ours. When that is the case, recalibrate your expectations. Consider the caregiver who spends a lot of energy trying to prevent their loved one from rummaging through drawers and closets. Maybe rummaging is the only activity they enjoy. Instead of being irritated, find a way to make rummaging or packing more acceptable.



Routine – Alzheimer's can take away a person's initiative and ability to adapt to change. Maintaining a stable routine helps them function at their best. A routine gives boundaries and helps them know what to expect.

Reassurance has been called the best the human apothecary has to offer. Why not offer your loved one a dose of what they need most? As the world becomes increasingly unfamiliar, give constant reassurance. While reasoning creates doubt and fear, reassurance soothes and calms.