



► **Understanding that home" has both a physical and an emotional**

meaning

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ALZHEIMER'S *In-Service* M O N T H L Y

BEST PRACTICES IN RESIDENT-CENTERED CARE

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There's no place like home: Environment affects behavior

KEY POINTS

- | **A person who says he wants to go home is essentially communicating emotional and/or physical discomfort.**
- | **We can increase emotional comfort by paying attention to noise levels and taking steps to maximize the ability to hear clearly.**
- | **Because both balance and proprioception deteriorate with age and AD, caregivers should take steps to maximize maneuverability through rooms.**

When a person with Alzheimer's disease and diminished verbal skills utters the phrase, "I want to go home," it's important to recognize that "home" has both a physical and an emotional meaning. On the physical level, home is a haven where he is most comfortable using the bathroom, sleeping, eating, and relaxing, which are issues that are easy to solve. On the emotional level, home is where the person feels safe, valued, and loved - where he belongs. We often forget, however, that the emotional needs of a person with AD are influenced by the physical environment.

A person with AD who says, "I want to go home," is essentially saying, "I am uncomfortable; remove me from this setting." In his book, *Through the Wilderness of Alzheimer's*, Robert



Simpson describes a time when he was at an event with his wife but longed to be home: "I was just wearing out. I couldn't understand why we didn't go home. . . I was trying so hard to keep going, but the day had just gone on too long. All my wires started crossing. . . It was like being in molasses."

Although there are a thousand reasons someone may be uncomfortable in a particular setting - from ugly wallpaper to a draft coming through the window - we can overcome these discomforts by attending to three factors: noise, maneuverability, and light. Noise and maneuverability are reviewed below. Light is discussed in detail later in this issue.

Noise is simply unwanted sound, and our lives are filled with it. Background noises, such as air conditioners, furnaces, refrigerators, running water, vacuum cleaners, leaf blowers, traffic noises, people shouting, and piped in music, may be irritating or interfere with good communication, especially when a person has a hearing problem. About two-thirds of those aged 85 and over have a significant hearing problem, and most have either no hearing aids or imperfect ones.

CAREGIVER TIPS

REJUVENATING OUTDOOR SPACES

Being outdoors provides enormous benefits to both caregivers and care receivers. Did you know:

- Getting outdoors on a regular basis and exposing our hands and faces to the sun for about 10 minutes several times a week is essential for our body's proper manufacture of Vitamin D (the sunshine vitamin), which in turn affects our calcium levels and the strength of our bones.
- Taking a daily walk outdoors is also a mood-lifter that increases our sense of well-being and can boost confidence and physical stamina.
- Outdoor exercise (games like croquet, activities like gardening, and even outdoor discussions) can increase our appetites and contribute to better sleep patterns.
- The simple act of stepping outdoors and "communing with nature" can decrease loneliness and anxiety.

Rejuvenate yourself and your care receivers with time outdoors often!



There's no place like home: Environment affects behavior

FROM PAGE ONE

For older adults, sounds can be hard to separate (background noises from conversation) or too soft (children's and women's voices). Sounds may also be too muffled. In other words, beginning and ending consonants are misunderstood: A man bragged to his neighbor about his expensive, new, state-of-the-art hearing aid. The neighbor asked, "What kind is it?" The man answered, "2:00 o'clock."

We are all happy to "tune out" the world now and then, but continually and unintentionally misinterpreting others' words can be extremely frustrating. Alzheimer's disease makes the situation worse. One person with AD said, "If it's noisy, I can't untangle it." To reduce noise and echoes, add fabric shower curtains to bathrooms, hang quilts along hallways, carpet floors, upholster furniture, and read the books listed in this issue's Resources section for further advice.

Exercises like yoga and Tai chi have become popular with older adults partially because of their effectiveness in helping to maintain balance and flexibility, two aspects of physical fitness that tend



to deteriorate with age and affect maneuverability. Additionally, AD damages the part of the brain that affects proprioception, or an understanding of where the body is in space. This loss is the reason it can be so difficult to coax a person with AD to sit down in a chair or get into a car. It is also the reason they often prefer to go barefoot (to literally feel more grounded), and why they have trouble maneuvering through a crowded dining room or hesitate when entering a crowded elevator. Uncluttered rooms with clear pathways aid maneuverability and are essential elements of a comforting environment.

KEEP IN MIND: CLUTTER IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

We noted above that maneuvering through cluttered rooms can create discomfort for a person with AD. Perceived clutter can create discomfort for a seated person as well. In the dining room, a person may be upset by too many foods or too large a plate and will do better if she is served small bowls of food offered one bowl at a time. Some people are unable to concentrate on eating when distracted by too many utensils, plates, glasses, salt and pepper shakers, centerpieces, or cream and sugar containers.

A person may get up and leave a craft activity if all the parts of a multi-step project are placed in front of her at once, because the project

seems overwhelming. Recognizing individual comfort levels can help to alleviate these challenges..

Key Points:

Clutter contributes to the confusion of people with AD who are often overwhelmed by things we overlook.

When a person hesitates to perform a task or makes an effort to leave a room or activity, look for ways clutter may be contributing - too much food on a plate, too many items on a table, or even too many people in a room.

Let there be light

When they express a desire to go home, people with AD are frequently expressing a concern for their physical or emotional safety. Another way we can create safe and comfortable environments for those with AD is by literally shedding light on the world. Elizabeth C. ("Betsy") Brawley, is the author of two excellent books on designing spaces for people with Alzheimer's disease (See Resources). She has six main recommendations about lighting:

1) Raise the overall level of illumination.

Because of age-related changes to their eyes (and numerous common eye conditions that may go undetected in people with AD), older people need two or three times more light to see as clearly as younger caregivers.

2) Provide consistent, even light levels. Wall sconces and chandeliers may be lovely, but they create distracting "hot spots" of light and sometimes indecipherable, even scary, shadows for a person with Alzheimer's disease. Be aware of outdoor lighting effects, too. One caregiver describes a woman with AD who was frightened every night by the "fires" outside her window. Finally, staff recognized the woman had been misinterpreting the red landscape lighting on the trees.

3) Eliminate glare. Although this seems to contradict the first issue - the need for more light - older adults are particularly sensitive to glare. Glare not only interferes with their ability to see objects around them clearly, but it can also cause eye pain and headaches. You can help eliminate glare by:

- using awnings and sheer curtains on windows (which reduce glare without blocking natural light)
- tinting sidewalks pink or green
- adjusting room blinds throughout the day for the person with AD who cannot adjust them properly herself
- purchasing china with a low-gloss finish (preferably in colors that make it easy to distinguish the plate from the food on it)
- using a low-gloss polish on waxed floors

4) Provide access to natural daylight. This means both getting people outdoors regularly and using windows, skylights, greenhouse spaces, and atriums to bring outdoor light inside. Most of us are uncomfortable being in windowless rooms. The natural passage of daylight through windows also contributes to maintaining our circadian rhythm (our orientation to day and night).



5) Provide gradual changes in light levels.

Outdoor natural light can be 1000 times brighter than indoor light. The eyes of older adults adjust slowly from a bright outdoor space to an indoor hallway, or similar changes. It may take as much as 10 minutes for someone who has been outdoors to see clearly again upon coming inside. Foyers need to be as brightly lit as possible to mitigate the extreme change, and should have comfortable chairs where people can sit while their eyes adjust.

6) Provide focused task lighting.

Whether eating, reading, or flower-arranging, older adults need more light for concentrated tasks.

KEY POINTS

- | People with AD have a strong need to feel safe in their environments and are easily confused by their surroundings. Literally shedding light on those surroundings can help.
- | Brawley's six main lighting guidelines include: raising the overall level of illumination, eliminating glare, providing even lighting, offering access to natural daylight, ensuring gradual changes between indoor and outdoor lighting, and supplying focused task lighting.

RESOURCES

Elizabeth C. ("Betsy") Brawley, a design consultant specializing in Alzheimer's care, is the author of two excellent books on creating quality environments. Although both books have "Alzheimer's" in the title and were written for the residential and day care industry, both feature concepts that apply to all aging adults in professional and home care settings. Find these books at: www.BetsyBrawley.com:

- *Designing for Alzheimer's Disease* (© 1997)
- *Design Innovations for Aging and Alzheimer's* (© 2005)

Another excellent and detailed resource that is useful for general aging issues in both residential and home care settings is Mark Warner's *The Complete Guide to Alzheimer's Proofing Your Home* (Revised paperback edition, © 2000)

TRAINER'S CORNER

IN-SERVICE GUIDE

The "Trainer's Corner" helps you relate the topic to caregivers' personal experiences in order to make it relevant and memorable. With each issue, we will provide

discussion questions and an engaging exercise. A quiz is available on Page 5 to test participants' knowledge. (The answers appear on the bottom of this page.)

Bringing the lesson home

Give each person a piece of graph paper and a pencil. Ask them to draw their perfect "get-away-from-it-all" spot. They may try to draw a side view or a floor plan. It may be:

- A bedroom (complete with feather bed, fireplace, spa tub, refrigerator, wide-screen TV, and NO telephone!)
- A cabin in the woods or by the sea
- A gazebo in a flower garden with gentle breezes blowing and birds singing
- Any other place where they feel safe, relaxed, and carefree

Ask them to think about the elements that make it ideal for all of their senses - sight, sounds, smells, taste, and touch. If this ideal sanctuary involves others, ask who else is there and how that person is significant.



Let's talk

Give participants a chance to talk about the details of their perfect sanctuary and why those details are important. Draw out individual elements: Some may prefer nature sounds; others will want specific music. Some will choose a setting in mountain snow; others on a beach in Tahiti. Some will imagine sipping a frozen daiquiri; others will dream of Krispy Kreme donuts. Some people's fantasy may include an attractive partner or a close friend, while others would be delighted to have some time alone. Encourage participants to have fun with their ideas!

- What you want participants to learn is:
- Each person's idea of home - a place where we feel safe and relaxed - is highly individualized.
- For some people, sanctuary means being close to loved ones (or lovers). Older adults may long to be reunited with the family members and friends who have died before them and whom they miss. Others may simply long for more contact with children, grandchildren, and current friends.
- What do you know - or can you learn - about what elements create a safe and relaxing place for the people you care for? What things can you do to create that place for each person?
- This issue is primarily focused on creating spaces that are perceived as physically safe, but how can you create an emotionally safe atmosphere through kind words, gestures, and loving touches?

Answer Key for Quiz on Page 5

1) b 2) d 3) a 4) b 5) d

QUIZ: Motivation — Part 3

PLEASE COPY AND DISTRIBUTE TO EACH PARTICIPANT

First Name

Last Name

Quiz Date

Supervisor's Signature

Date

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Please answer the following questions based on the information on the previous pages.

- 1) People with AD have many possible reasons for saying they want to go home. Which of the following is LEAST likely to be a helpful response?**
 - a. Offering something to eat or a place to rest
 - b. Telling the person, "Your ARE home. This is where you live now."
 - c. Removing them from a noisy room where people are shouting or loud music is playing
 - d. Reducing background noises in the room
 - e. Re-arranging furniture so that there are clear pathways, and it's easy to find a place to sit down

- 2) Which of the following are common hearing problems for people as they age?**
 - a. Being unable to distinguish background noises from the conversation they want to hear
 - b. Being unable to hear high-pitched sounds such as children's or women's voices
 - c. Hearing sounds as muffled so that they can't understand beginning and ending consonants.
 - d. All of the above
 - e. B and C only

- 3) Clutter for people with AD can mean many things. Which of the following is LEAST likely to be a confusing or frustrating environmental element for someone with AD?**
 - a. A built-in book shelf full of books
 - b. A dinner plate loaded with items from a buffet
 - c. A dining room filled with people and wheel chairs, with little space between tables
 - d. An elegant place setting with multiple forks, spoons, glasses and individual finger bowls
 - e. A gardening activity in which the following items are placed in front of each person: container of dirt, empty pot, gardening gloves, trowel, seedlings, small watering can and a picture of fully grown tomato plants

- 4) As people age, they need more light to complete almost any task, so you needn't worry about too much light from window glare.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 5) It is important for all older people to get outdoors regularly. Which of the following is NOT a known benefit of being outdoors?**
 - a. Improved circadian rhythms and normal sleep patterns
 - b. Increased appetite
 - c. Decreased anxiety and improving one's sense of well-being
 - d. Reduced wrinkles
 - e. Enhanced ability to manufacture Vitamin D in the body, which leads to better calcium levels and stronger bones