When to Put an Alzheimer’s Patient Into a Home

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Knowing the Signs and Weighing Your Options

As Alzheimer’s disease progresses, things can get complicated quickly. Your role may shift or develop before your eyes: once you were a gentle helper, but now you might be a hands-on supervisor. Advancing Alzheimer’s almost always means closer care, and when you’re the primary caregiver you could find yourself stretching to fulfill all the obligations.

There are sacrifices to be made when you care for an aging loved one, but it’s important to know when you’ve reached your limit. Find out when to consider a change in care, and what form that change could take.

Your Alzheimer’s Care Options

When you can no longer handle the everyday obligations of caring for your loved one, you might assume a full-time nursing home is the only option. However, there may be a way to continue the care in your own home, with the help of a local center, or in a specialized part-time facility.

Non-Medical Care

You could hire a private personal sitter or home health care services to help with everyday tasks. These helpers may be trained in occupational therapy, but they may also simply be willing to help with household chores like laundry, dressing, hygiene and meal preparation.

The idea is to free up a bit of your time for you to tackle other tasks. Since this service is typically provided by a private company, the expense likely won’t be covered by insurance.

Respite Groups

This sort of care is designed to help out with caregiving (literally giving you a “respite” from your chores) for a few hours once a week. The great bonus is this relief is free. Contact the Alzheimer’s Association or your local Area Agency on Aging to see if there might be any respite groups in your area.

Alzheimer’s Assisted Living Facility

When supplemental help isn’t cutting it, you may need to call upon an assisted care facility. Long-term care insurance should cover the cost, and you can rest assured the people in charge know how best to treat and care for those with cognitive disabilities.

Your last option is a nursing home (preferably with a dedicated Alzheimer’s unit), and you’ll need to research and compare the available local options before you decide which will suit your loved one best. Although it can be difficult to know when it’s time, these symptoms and markers are good indicators that a move is necessary:

- **They need around-the-clock care**. You are only one person, and you simply can't handle a 24-hour shift. When you can't be away for longer than a moment, it's a sign that the task has become too much for you to handle.
- **Your home is no longer safe for them.** If they're beginning to wander a lot, and falling is an issue, your home may not be a good space for them.
- **Your livelihood and daily responsibilities are suffering.** Caring for anyone will naturally take time away from other tasks, but if you're struggling to make ends meet or other family members' needs have fallen by the wayside, it's time to consider a change.

Easing Into the Change

Making the transition to full-time care can be just as difficult for you as it is for the patient — perhaps even more challenging. You'll be juggling emotions, decisions, and an abrupt separation from your loved one while you arrange for ongoing treatment in their new home.

As you weigh the different variables, use the resources around you to help with the decision and transition. What seems like a massive, sudden shift at first could actually be accomplished with some intermediate steps that take pressure off of everyone involved.

Make the Decision Together

If possible, talk to your loved one about the move into full-time care. It can be a difficult conversation, but it's helpful to have them involved in the decision-making process. It will bring their fears and worries to the surface, and you'll have a better chance of finding the right facility to suit their expectations.

Making the decision together ahead of time should also help to ease resentment. You'll be able to reassure them in the months and weeks leading up to the move, and that should make the move itself easier.

Lean on Professionals

A smooth transition may require a bit of outside help. Call on your doctors and a social worker to assess your loved one's needs, as well as your own. A meeting with a psychologist or group therapist can help you adjust your expectations, and maybe open up new avenues for support and companionship as your lives begin to change.

Arrange for Frequent Visits

Talk to the facility about what you will and won't be able to do once your loved one has moved in. Let them know you'd like to see them often, and find out when the best times to visit might be. Call on their expertise and take their advice. The staff are well-trained and probably have a lot of answers to your questions, so don't hold back.

When you build a relationship with the staff from the start, it will be easier to advocate for your loved one and stay on top of their health. Be warm and civil, and you're more likely to get friendly and generous treatment in return.

Treat Yourself Right

Deciding to move someone you love into a home can bring a wealth of conflicting emotions, and it's easy to get buried under the guilt and sadness. Take a step back, forgive yourself, and remember that this is a completely rational reaction — it doesn't mean you made the wrong choice.

Once the move is underway, take a look at one way in which you've been neglecting yourself (there are probably several to choose from). Commit to making it up to yourself as you move into this next phase of care. With professional help for your loved one in place, you can divert some energy back to your own health, while still taking an active part in their life.