Dementia: Information for Caregivers

Dementia is a devastating disease, and it can be very stressful for patients and families or other caregivers. As the disease worsens, people with dementia are not able to take care for themselves. Looking after someone with dementia can be overwhelming, but the following tips can help make your job as a caregiver a little easier:

- Make a plan every day, and be ready to be flexible if needed.
- Try to be patient. People with dementia often repeat statements and questions several times. This is common, and may mean the person is anxious or worried.
- Make some lists. Write out daily activities, phone numbers, and instructions for usual tasks (such as how to use the telephone and microwave).
- Create calm nighttime routines to keep your patient from acting out at night. Leave a night-light on in the bedroom.
- Don’t make big changes to the home environment.
- Make sure your home is safe. Put locks on medicine cabinets, keep furniture in the same place to prevent falls, take electrical appliances out of the bathroom, install grab bars in the bathroom and set the water heater below 120 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Help the patient help themselves. Taking a bath every day isn’t necessary, but make sure to call the doctor’s office if the patient starts to get sores in their mouth or genitals (from bed-wetting or dentures that don’t fit, for example).
- Speak slowly. Say only one idea at a time and give the person time to answer.
- Exercise. A daily walk can keep your patient in shape and improve behavioral problems.

Consider getting help, such as with respite care, which can give your and your family a break and help recharge your energy. Many cities offer in-home care or adult day care. Care giving can be overwhelming. Be sure to take time for yourself, take care of your own medical problems, and arrange for breaks when you need them.