

## Long Distance Caregiving

### Alzheimer's Association

Caregiving is difficult no matter the circumstances, but caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease who lives miles away is especially challenging. Not being able to see the person on a regular basis may lead to anxiety as you worry about their safety, nutrition and health.

If your loved one lives on their own, it is important to make plans to ensure your visits are enjoyable and your time away as free of worry as possible. Following are three steps that can help:

**Identify Need** – During visits, be sure to determine what help the person may need. What is the state of the house? Is there food in the fridge, or is the food spoiled? Is the person paying their bills and still able to drive? Check to see if neighbors and friends have been visiting.

**Establish Contacts** – It is helpful to keep in touch with individuals living near your loved one:

- Ask family, friends and neighbors if you can't check in periodically.
- Keep in contact with your loved one's physician.
- Take advantage of community organizations and agencies that might provide needed services.
- Employ geriatric care managers and trusted professionals like attorneys when making decisions.
- Ensure legal documents are in place with an elder law attorney.
- Contact the local Alzheimer's Association to identify appropriate services.

**Make the most of visits** – Visits to your loved one provide the perfect opportunity to check in with family and friends concerning the person and to meet with their physician and other professionals. However, make sure to really enjoy the time you spend with the person and take advantage of your chance to be together. Plan a special conversation, reminisce and learn all you can about your loved one, as a person.

As dementia progresses, the care you provide, even long-distance, will change. You may recognize the need to move the person, and may consider your own home or a facility. Before moving them to your home, consider whether this is the best choice for everyone. Does the person want to move? Is your home equipped for them, or will there be someone around to care for them?

If an assisted living or residential care facility is best for everyone, maintain communication with staff and family, and meet with these individuals when you visit. Visit the facility regularly, and unannounced, and have friends and loved ones do the same. In either case, consult the person's physician and the Alzheimer's Association before moving your loved one.

Long-distance care may be a challenge, but constant communication is key. Family conflicts may arise, but talking through problems and ensuring caregiving responsibilities are shared will help resolve these issues. Even from miles away, your continuous help will be valued by your loved one, family and friends.

For more information contact the Alzheimer's Association at 800.272.3900 or visit [alz.org/greateriowa](http://alz.org/greateriowa).