

Assisted Living At Its Best

SPECIALIZING IN DEMENTIA AND ALZHEIMERS CARE



Questions on Alzheimer's Disease and on Dementia

My mother's doctor says that she has Alzheimer's; how can I be sure this is the correct diagnosis?

Although there isn't a definitive way to diagnose Alzheimer's; the diagnosis is usually made through the process of elimination. A comprehensive evaluation of your loved one's condition can provide the information needed to make the diagnosis. Not all doctors are experts in the diagnosing and managing of the disease. You should feel comfortable in seeking a second opinion from a doctor with an expertise in dementia.

There is a family history of Alzheimer's disease. Is it inevitable that I will also be afflicted with this disease?

No. The disease has not been shown to correspond to known patterns of inheritance. The disease has only been recognized for about a decade, so definitive research on families is just beginning.

My mother has, on occasion, gotten lost on her way home from the store and often does not remember to take her medication on time. The doctor says I should look into finding more care for her. What choices are there?

I don't want to see her in a nursing home or some other large institutionalized environment. There are several alternatives. Contracting with a home health agency for an in-home caregiver, Elder Day Care, Assisted Living complexes or smaller homes are available. Advantages to using a home health agency are that your mother is able to stay in her own home. If memory loss is an issue, there is some question as to how important being in her home really is. It may be more important for the



family. Disadvantages are the need to monitor the agency for reliability and compassion in caring for your mother's special needs. You want someone who has training in dementia care and management, and who is licensed to administer medication. You would also need to modify the home to meet her new security needs. This care is usually very expensive, especially if you are in need of 24-hour care.

If you need supervision for your mother while you are at work, an Elder Day Care center may meet your needs. They provide organized programs of activities as well as the opportunity to socialize with others. The challenge is finding one that is convenient to your hours and location.

If you are interested in twenty-four hour care, an assisted living arrangement may be a more cost-effective alternative. The large assisted living complexes can have over a hundred rooms and have the feel of a hotel or apartment complex.

These are more appropriate for someone who still has a high level of functioning. The frustration of your loved one being lost in their own place of residence could still be present for your loved one. Another issue to keep in mind is the high resident-to-staff ratio.

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The smaller assisted living homes may better suit your needs. These homes have five to six residents per certified caregiver to care for your mother. The resident-to-staff-ratio is very low and allows individualized care twenty-four hours a day.

Make sure that the home specializes in dementia care and is secured for the wandering resident. These caregivers should be trained to use specific techniques to provide an emotionally safe environment for your mother.

I have heard of so-called locked facilities. It sounds very institutional, but my dad needs the security for his safety.

What does it mean to be in a “secured home” and will it seem like a jail to my dad and the rest of our family?

Usually these terms refer to a home built and licensed to provide specialized dementia care. Always ask what the home means by “secured home”. You want a place that has secured doors, and yards as well as a staff educated to understand the emotional, cognitive

and behavioral aspects of dementia. The home should also provide emotional security – knowing someone is just a call away if they fall, get sick, or just want to talk. The homes that provide residents with individual attention offer plenty of diverse activities and look for individual ways to control behavior will enhance the quality of life for your loved one. Golden Orchard homes are just that: a house laid out to provide safe and comfortable living.

If a place uses drugs and restraints to secure residents, look elsewhere.

According to the doctor, my mother has been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. She seems to become very agitated and confused when we are out in public and around large groups of people. What can I do to help her feel more at ease? Are there any places that are smaller and more home-like that can care for her needs?

Experts equate having Alzheimer’s to being like a visitor in a foreign land. Every day is a new world they don’t understand, and they must try to cope in it. Persons with dementia have three areas of deficits: memory, judgment and orientation. These three deficits lead to loss of ability in five other areas:

self care, attention, language, recognition and motor skills. Your mother’s agitation is a sign of distress. She may not remember or recognize the place, the people, or understand the words she hears. Her daily routine may have been disrupted. Reality orientation does not work with people who have dementia. Instead, try to understand her feelings and



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comfort those feelings. You may need to remove her from the area to ease her distress. Become aware of your mother's signals to communicate her needs. As dementia progresses, she can't always communicate her needs in the obvious manner.

Assisted living homes designated to the care of dementia residents would probably serve your mother well. She will need care and attention from a staff trained in dementia care to anticipate her needs by understanding her body language, facial expression and tone of voice. They can also help establish a daily routine and/or simplify tasks for her. All of these techniques will help her feel more safe and comfortable.

Are there any medications that can cure Alzheimer's or slow down the process?

At this time there isn't a cure for Alzheimer's. However, there are several medications and natural supplements that are believed to slow down the progress of the disease. Much research is being performed and hopefully in the near future there can be more help.

My mother was a very active person before the onset of Alzheimer's. I can't seem to get her interested in doing anything. Most of her old hobbies seem too much for to handle. Does Golden Orchard provide activities and how do they get residents to participate?

People want to do things that feel good physically and emotionally. Your mother may not be able to concentrate on her old hobbies or her motor skill deficit may hinder her ability to perform the tasks necessary to be successful. Golden Orchard does provide activities for their residents. Besides specific techniques to motivate your mother, the staff can determine what activities best meet her level of functioning. Thus, she can feel successful. The specially trained staff can also determine if other factors are causing problems and manage accordingly. The low resident-to-staff ratio at Golden Orchard allows the staff the time to become well acquainted with your mother, to learn her agenda and to honor it as much as possible.

My dad is on several different medications and has three doctors. I can't possibly keep up with all the changes in his medications or make certain that he takes them on time. How do I know if he moves into an assisted living home that this will all be taken care of?

Visit the home and request to see how medications are handled. Make sure the caregiver is careful to administer and oversee medications. The staff at Golden Orchard is able to provide the skills and communication necessary to monitor your dad's medications with all the physicians.

