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What You Will Learn:

- Definition of Alzheimer's
- What causes Alzheimer's
- Risk Factors of Alzheimer's
- Signs and Symptoms of Alzheimer's
- The aide's role in working with client's with Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's is a type of dementia that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. Symptoms usually develop slowly and get worse over time, **becoming severe enough to interfere with daily tasks.**

What causes Alzheimer's:

- No one knows
- Physical changes take place in the brain
- Plaques and tangles form in the brain
- Brain cells which send messages to each other - called "neurons" can not relay the messages as well due to the plaques and tangles

Scientists believe Alzheimer's disease prevents parts of a cell's factory from running well. They are not sure where the trouble starts. But just like a real factory, backups and breakdowns in one system cause problems in other areas. As damage spreads, cells lose their ability to do their jobs and, eventually die, causing irreversible changes in the brain. Neurons are the chief type of cell destroyed by Alzheimer's disease.

- **Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia**, a general term for memory loss and other intellectual abilities serious enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's disease accounts for 50 to 80 percent of dementia cases.
- Alzheimer's is not the only cause of memory loss.
- Many people have trouble with memory — this does NOT mean they have Alzheimer's. There are many different causes of memory loss.
- **Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging**, although the greatest known risk factor is increasing age, and the majority of people with Alzheimer's are 65 and older. But Alzheimer's is not just a disease of old age. Up to 5 percent of people with the disease have early-onset Alzheimer's (also known as younger-onset), which often appears when someone is in their 40s or 50s.
- No two people experience Alzheimer's disease in the same way.
- Alzheimer's disease and related dementias can cause a person to act in different and unpredictable ways. Some individuals with Alzheimer's become anxious or aggressive. Others repeat certain questions and gestures. Many misinterpret what they see or hear. These types of reactions can lead to misunderstanding, frustration and tension, particularly between the person with dementia and the caregiver. It is important to understand that the person is not acting that way on purpose. A person with Alzheimer's may not recognize familiar people, places or things. He or she may forget relationships, call family members by other names or become confused about where home is. A person may also forget the purpose of common items, such as a pen or a fork. These situations are extremely difficult for caregivers and families and require much patience and understanding.

Sources- Alzheimer's Association; AHHC Caring Connection- Working with a Patient with Alz. 2007

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Alzheimer's Disease

The Aide's Role

Dressing and Grooming: Helping a person with dementia maintain his or her appearance can promote positive self-esteem. There are several ways to assist with dressing and grooming routines.

Choosing and putting on clothes can be frustrating for the person with dementia. The person may not remember how to dress or may be overwhelmed with the choices or the task itself.

To assist:

Organize the process. Lay out clothing in the order that each item should be put on. Hand the person one item at a time while giving short, simple instructions such as "Put on your shirt," rather than "Get dressed."

Pick comfortable and simple clothing. Cardigans, shirts and blouses that button in front are easier to work than pullover tops. Substitute Velcro® for buttons, snaps or zippers, which may be too difficult to handle. Make sure that clothing is loose fitting, especially at the waist hips – and choose fabrics that are soft and stretchable.

Make mealtimes easier:

Limit distractions.

Keep the table setting simple.

- **Distinguish food from the plate or bowl.**
- **Check the food temperature.**
- **Serve only one or two foods at a time.**
- **Be flexible to food preferences.**
- **Give the person plenty of time to eat.**
- **Keep in mind the person may not remember when or if he or she ate.** If the person continues to ask about eating breakfast, consider serving several breakfasts — juice, followed by toast, followed by cereal.

Bathing :People with dementia may resist, scream or hit during bathing. Such behavior often occurs because the person doesn't remember what bathing is for or doesn't have the patience to endure such unpleasant parts of the task like lack of modesty, being cold or other discomforts. Loss of independence and privacy can be very difficult for the person with dementia. The disease also may increase sensitivity to water temperature or pressure. Talk with your supervisor about how to handle these behaviors.

Helping the person feel in control: Give the person choices. For example, ask: "Would you like to take a bath or a shower?" "Do you prefer to bathe now or in 15 minutes?" Be sure the person has a role. Have the person hold a washcloth or shampoo bottle. Be aware that the person may perceive bathing to be threatening. If the person resists bathing or acts out, distract him or her and try again later. Praise the person for his or her efforts and cooperation. Always protect the person's dignity, privacy and comfort. Try to help the person feel less vulnerable by covering the person with a bath blanket while undressing. Report any changes in the patient's condition or refusals of service to your supervisor.

Other Basic Things you can do to help when caring for a client with Alzheimer's:

- Make allowances
- Show interest
- Avoid distractions and noise
- Keep things simple
- Don't interrupt
- Use a calm, relaxed tone of voice
- Stick to a routine
- Explain before doing

Remember - Never leave the person alone in the bathroom!

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POST-TEST on Alzheimer's

Name: _____

Circle True or False on the following questions:

1. Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia.

True

False

2. Alzheimer's is a normal part of aging.

True

False

3. All people with Alzheimer's will have the same behaviors and symptoms.

True

False

4. Alzheimer's is caused by physical changes that take place in the brain.

True

False

5. Alzheimer's is a type of dementia that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior.

True

False

6. Alzheimer's is not the only cause of memory loss.

True

False

Circle the correct answer or answers for the following questions:

7. Alzheimer's disease can cause a person to:

- a. become anxious or aggressive
- b. repeat certain questions and gestures
- c. misinterpret what they see or hear
- d. act in different and unpredictable ways
- e. be unable to recognize familiar people, places or things
- f. forget relationships
- g. all of the above

- 8 . The Aide's Role in Helping a Client with Alzheimer's for dressing include:
 - a. organize the process
 - b. Try to get the client to dress in a hurry to avoid frustration
 - c. Pick comfortable and simple clothing
 - d. lay out clothing in the order that each item should be put on
 - e. give short and simple instructions
 - f. all of the above

9. The Aide's Role in Helping a Client with Alzheimer's at mealtime include:
 - a. Limit distractions
 - b. Keep the table setting simple
 - c. Check the food temperature
 - d. Give the person plenty of time to eat
 - e. Be flexible to food preferences
 - f. all of the above

10. Other Basic Things you can do to help when caring for a client with Alzheimer's include:
 - a. Make allowances
 - b. Show interest
 - c. Don't stick to the same routine, that will be boring
 - d. Explain before doing
 - e. Keep things simple
 - f. don't interrupt
 - g. all of the above