

How to know when it is time for residential care?

We all know that Alzheimer's disease/related dementias are progressive in nature. As dementia progresses and there is growing confusion, there is also growing dependency on others for daily living and safety. This becomes very taxing for most family caregivers as dementia, on average, will last for 8 - 10 years. While none of us ever want to think that we will need to use residential care (assisted living, memory care or nursing homes), the reality is that for most, this type of care will be needed in the last 1-2 years of life (if not earlier). Using residential care does not mean you are a failure – it means you understand when you have reached your ability to provide the care that is needed or to keep your loved one safe and comfortable.

Here are some of the common things that can happen that will indicate you will need to consider residential care:

- **Escalating behaviors** that you cannot manage despite all your best efforts (including medications and other non-medication strategies). This can include:
 - o Repeated attempts to leave the home and/or getting out and becoming lost.
 - o Person has growing evening confusion (also called sundowning) and insists on going home or so physically restless you cannot stop their pacing.
 - o Person sees things that are not there (hallucinations) that are and/or believes things that are not true (delusions) AND they are distressed by them.
 - o Growing verbal and/or physical agitation toward you or others in the household.
- **Escalating care concerns** that exceed what the caregiver can provide. This might include:
 - o Loss of bladder and bowel control. Handling incontinent episodes can be difficult.
 - o Assistance needed for bathing and dressing (usually when the person is resistant to help).
 - o Needs assistance to get up from a chair and/or walk from more than 1 person.
 - o Sleep/wake cycle is disturbed, and the person wants to stay up all night long.
 - o More frequent emergency room/urgent care visits, or hospitalizations.
- **Escalating safety concerns.** This is especially true for the person who lives alone with dementia.
 - o Leaving stoves on, starting fires, using appliances inappropriately
 - o Not taking medications safely (or at all)
 - o Increased falls
 - o Firearms in the home coupled with confusion and paranoia
- **Escalating caregiver health concerns.** After many years of 24/7, caregivers wear out! You are not weak, you are tired and your physical, mental and spiritual health is suffering too. Here are signs you need to let go:
 - o Recent hospitalization(s)
 - o Health is deteriorating
 - o Feelings of extreme stress
 - o Depression that doesn't allow you to care for yourself or your loved one
 - o Losing your temper frequently with your loved one. Fearful of acting out toward that person.

Most caregivers recognize that there are combined reasons that they can no longer care for their loved one at home. It is okay to give yourself permission to think about residential care. It can take time and

planning to find the best option available for you and your loved one. Talk with your support group, a social worker or even consider connecting with an adult placement professional who can walk you through the process.

This is tough – but you are strong. You’ve learned to be resilient as a caregiver. Don’t be afraid to take the steps you need to protect the health and well-being of both your loved one and you!