

Take Inventory of Remaining Abilities

Unfortunately, most of the tests administered by doctors to understand the impact and progression of Alzheimer's disease/related dementia, focus on loss of thinking skills and function NOT remaining strengths of the affected person. And, as a caregiver, it often becomes easier to do something for your loved one than to let them do it by themselves. However, this can lead to what we call, "excess disability." Meaning that we will cause them to become more disabled as they forget how to do common tasks that use "motor memory."

A common mistake that is often made is to ask the person to "try harder." This generally won't work because the harder they think about the task, the more confusing it becomes. Often what works better, is to start the intended task with the person and rev up the "motor memory." Another way is to let the person watch you do something you'd like them to do OR do the activity together.

While it is important to be aware of loss of thinking skills and function so that you can support your loved one to feel successful in what they can do, it is equally important to take time and inventory what abilities remain. It is not uncommon for the person living with dementia to "rise to the occasion" when friends or families visit or when going out to a social situation. Somehow the person seems to magically do things they can't do at home or become very conversant. This is often frustrating for the caregiver who will hear from family/friends that their loved one "isn't that bad." This is a great time to assess a remaining strength, i.e. the ability to be more like himself; the ability to show social grace and interest in others.

You know that each day can be very different. But, I hope you will celebrate good days and intact abilities of your loved one. They didn't choose to have dementia and you didn't choose it either. But, together you can celebrate what is left.