

Creating A Strategy For Dealing With Alzheimer's
By: Mordo Bono
CSA, Owner Home Helpers

Being diagnosed with Alzheimer's can be devastating. Although it may be emotionally difficult to be practical during this time; devising a strategy for dealing with the disease is critical. This article outlines some important steps that you and your loved ones should consider when formulating your strategy.

Educate Yourself

Before you can create a game plan for dealing with the disease, you'll need to have a better understanding of its progression and the types of symptoms/issues you can expect along the way. Of course, your first source of information is the doctor that diagnosed the illness. Neurologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, and geriatricians can all provide insight into the disease.

While you may have had many questions during the doctor's visit when the diagnosis was given, you may have many more questions during the weeks and months ahead. Consider keeping a journal or note pad handy to jot down questions for your doctor/health care team. Keeping a journal also enables you to keep notes about doctor's visits for later review.

Speaking with CSAs (Certified Senior Advisors) and social workers may also be helpful. These professionals have experience dealing with senior specific issues and can help you locate beneficial resources and services. During this potentially stressful time, they can act as a calm and rational third party advocate and advisor. To locate a CSA in your area, visit the CSA website (<http://www.society-csa.com/CSAVerifier.aspx>)

In addition to speaking with medical and other professionals, there are a number of resources available to people diagnosed with Alzheimer's and their loved ones. The Alzheimer's Association (<http://www.alz.org>) has a robust website with a wide range of information and helpful tools. Items such as a brochure on getting the most from your doctor's visit, medication logs, and even a "tour" of the brain are all available. The website not only provides suggestions and advice, they also provide links to additional resources such as care providers, programs and support groups. Local Alzheimer's Association chapters can also provide support in person.

Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center (ADEAR— National Institute on Aging) (<http://www.alzheimers.org>) has a vast array of educational material and resources available on their website. Visitors can learn about research, diagnosis, treatments, clinical trials, federal government programs and resources. Their literature database has almost 8,500 materials about Alzheimer's including textbook chapters, articles, fact sheets, brochures, and videos.

Websites such as Web M.D. (<http://www.webmd.com/alzheimers>) offer a variety of information about the disease and coping with symptoms. The Web M.D. site has user reviews of Alzheimer's medications, a nursing home checklist, and an Alzheimer's disease guide.

Please be sure to read information supplied by trustworthy websites. The best way to find additional trusted websites is to visit the links pages of credible websites (such as those listed above.)

Investigate Treatment Options

The next step in your strategy is to investigate treatment options. Again, your doctor/health care team is the primary resource for information and guidance. Since there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's, treatment aims to manage the progression of the disease while helping people retain their functionality, independence, and quality of life.

Psychotherapy may be useful in helping people deal with the emotional aspects of being diagnosed with Alzheimer's. According to a number of recent studies, psychotherapy helped individuals by reducing the symptoms of depression, improving self esteem, and aiding in the preparation of dealing with future losses. (Society of Certified Senior Advisors, 2005)

Behavioral treatments aim to ensure that the person with Alzheimer's is free from physical discomfort and/or provide for a comfortable environment. As the disease progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult for people with the disease to communicate with caregivers about discomfort or pain. Routine medical evaluations including vision and hearing checks are an important aspect of treatment. Sensory impairments can agitate a person with Alzheimer's. Also, caregivers should monitor chronic health conditions while also being careful to monitor overall health and function. Utilizing daily routines and rituals; reducing stimulation in environments; and being around familiar people and things can help reduce stress for everyone.

Medications can help to slow the progression of the disease and allow individuals with Alzheimer's to be independent for a longer periods of time. Your doctor/health care team can determine if the use of medication could ease symptoms.

In addition to drugs that are currently on the market to treat symptoms, there are also a number of medications that are currently in development. Joining a clinical trial of medication in development enables participants to test treatments that are not yet available to the general public. To find a clinical trial, visit the Alzheimer's Association website and visit the "Clinical Studies" page (<http://www.alz.org/trialmatch/about.asp>).

Build A Support Network

Having a support/care network is a crucial part of building your strategy. As the disease progresses, individuals with Alzheimer's experience a decrease in their ability to function and independently care for themselves. In later stages of the disease, the amount of care/supervision will increase.

In the initial stages of the disease, individuals with Alzheimer's may be able to function fairly well on their own. While they may experience lapses in judgment or experience forgetfulness, they can still communicate fairly well and take care of their daily needs. Friends and family are generally able to provide the necessary help.

As mentioned earlier, individuals with Alzheimer's benefit from being surrounded by familiar environments, people and things; therefore, allowing them to live at home for as long as possible is preferable. When it gets to the point where friends and family cannot provide necessary care, caregivers can be hired to help care for people with Alzheimer's. Reputable Homecare agencies (such as Home Helpers <http://www.homehelpers.cc>) provide qualified caregivers for individuals in need of assistance. Having a compassionate caregiver offering assistance improves the quality of life for those living with Alzheimer's while providing peace of mind for their loved ones.

Adult day care programs are another option for people who need care but would like to stay at home. Individuals are picked up daily by bus and driven to the center where they interact with other seniors while being supervised and cared for by caregivers. While there is less one on one care, this option provides a safe environment with available caregivers standing by.

Assisted living facilities and nursing homes are an option for those that need more hands on care by skilled practitioners and nurses. As the disease progresses, this may be a better option for people in need of constant care and supervision. Unfortunately, these facilities are quite costly.

In addition to caregivers, other support programs – such as Meals on Wheels – are available to those in need of help. To find the right care option(s) for yourself or a loved one, visit the Department of Health and Human Services website at <http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Home.aspx> or call 800-677-1116.

Plan Ahead

Planning ahead is a vital step to ensuring that your wishes for your care are carried out. It is important to start planning as soon as possible, especially since it can become difficult to communicate concerns and preferences during later stages of Alzheimer's.

Discussing your wishes with loved ones is the first step in planning ahead. It is important that they understand how you would like to be cared for throughout the rest of your life. Once you've expressed your wishes verbally, you might also want to put your wishes in writing. Planning is another area in which working with eldercare professionals can be useful. Eldercare attorneys can help you determine the types of documents and paperwork needed to be in place to ensure that your wishes are carried out. They can provide assistance with advanced healthcare directives, healthcare proxies, estate planning, will, revocable trust, and power of attorney documents. To locate an elder law attorney near you, visit the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) website (<http://www.naela.com/>). You can also find many of these documents online. Financial experts, such as Suze Orman, offer these documents for a nominal fee (<http://www.suzeorman.com/index.cfm>).

While dealing with a life changing disease like Alzheimer's can be difficult, having your strategy in place as early as possible can help to make things easier for you and your loved ones.

About Mordo Bono

Mordo Bono is a Certified Senior Advisor and co-owner of Home Helpers in Queens, New York. Home Helpers (<http://www.homehelpersnyc.com>) is a home care agency based in the heart of Forest Hills and serves the greater

Queens area and neighboring boroughs of New York City. Home Helpers' full-range of non-medical home care services enables clients to live healthier, happier and more rewarding lives in the privacy, safety, and comfort of their own homes. This locally owned and operated office was established in 2008 and is part of the national Home Helpers organization (<http://www.homehelpers.cc>) that was launched in 1997. Mordo can be contacted via email at 58319@homehelpers.cc or by phone at (718)261-0158.