ST. FRANCIS 24/7 CALL CENTER: (321) 269-4240

St. Francis REFLECTIONS® Hospice
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Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease, causes a progressive decline in cognitive functions such as memory, thinking, and problem-solving, eventually interfering with the ability to perform daily tasks. Alzheimer's progression through early (mild), middle (moderate), and late (severe) stages.

Common Symptoms:

Symptoms may differ from person to person. Symptoms worsen over time.

- **Early signs include:**
  - Forgetfulness
  - Confusion
  - Difficulty finding words
  - Personality changes.
- **As the disease progresses:**
  - Difficulty with recognition of familiar faces
  - Difficulty communicating or lose of ability to communicate
  - Difficulty completing personal care tasks and daily activities, related to weakness and confusion eventually losing all capabilities

Causes:

Potential causes:

- The exact cause is not fully understood, but it involves the accumulation of abnormal proteins in the brain leading to brain cell death.

Hospice Considerations:

While there is no cure, treatments and care strategies can help manage symptoms and improve quality of life.

- **Severe Decline:** When the patient reaches an advanced stage where they are no longer able to perform basic activities of daily living, such as eating, dressing, and toileting.
- **End-Stage Symptoms:** When symptoms such as severe cognitive decline, inability to communicate, and significant weight loss occur.

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- **Comfort Care Needs:** When there is a need for comprehensive support to manage comfort and quality of life, including palliative care for behavioral symptoms.

Symptom Management Tips:

- **Agitation:** Redirection techniques, calm environments, and avoiding triggers (loud noises, crowded spaces) are helpful. For late-afternoon confusion or agitation (sundowning), keep activities calm and quiet, reduce noise and minimize shadows.
- **Communication:** Simplify communication with short sentences and visual cues. If the patient is hearing or seeing things remain calm. Acknowledge their feelings, but do not argue.
- **Safety:** Ensure the environment is free of fall risks. Locks and alarms may be needed for wandering patients.
- **Eating and hydration:** Patients may forget to eat or drink, requiring assistance. Offer small, appealing meals and ensure adequate hydration.
- **Physical Symptoms:** Dealing with incontinence, schedule regular bathroom visits, use absorbent pads, and ensure the person is comfortable and clean. Be aware that individuals with Alzheimer's may have difficulty expressing pain. Look for non-verbal cues like facial expressions or restlessness for uncontrolled pain.

How to Help:

- **Patient Tips:**
  - **Routine:** Establish a simple, consistent daily routine to reduce confusion and anxiety.
  - **Memory Aids:** Use calendars, notes, and visual cues to help remember tasks and appointments.
  - **Engagement:** Participate in enjoyable, low-stress activities to maintain social interaction and mental stimulation.
- **Caregiver Tips:**
  - **Patience and Reassurance:** Gently correct or redirect without arguing or overwhelming the patient with information.
  - **Safety First:** Ensure a safe environment by removing hazards, installing grab bars, and using alarms if necessary.
  - **Self-Care:** Take breaks and seek respite care to avoid burnout and maintain your own well-being.

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St. Francis Reflections is always available to assist with any questions or concerns 24/7

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