

**Learning to Connect:  
Relating to People With  
Alzheimer's**



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**Today's Objectives**

- Learn how Alzheimer's affects the brain
- Understand how these changes can impact relationships
- Break down common barriers
- Pull it all together & create truly meaningful moments

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**What is AD?**

- One of about 70 dementias
- Has a gradual onset
- Is variable from person to person
- Progressive and eventually fatal

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### Alzheimer's is much more than just forgetting

Causes changes in:

- Memory
- Language
- Thought
- Navigation
- Behavior
- Personality/Mood
- Planning and Organizing



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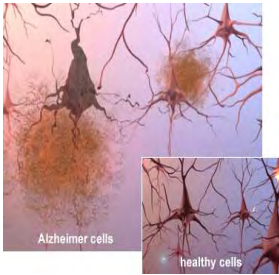
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### What happens to the brain?

- Plaques
- Tangles
- Neurotransmitter deficiency
- Brain Atrophy (Shrinkage)



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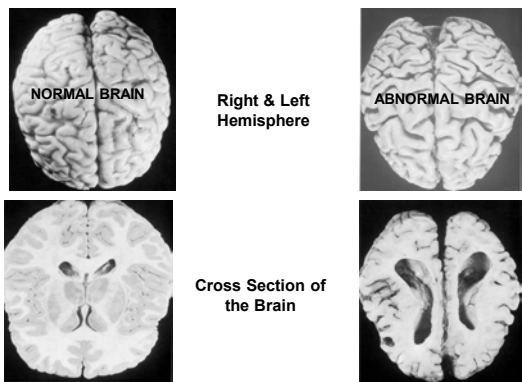
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Right & Left Hemisphere

Cross Section of the Brain

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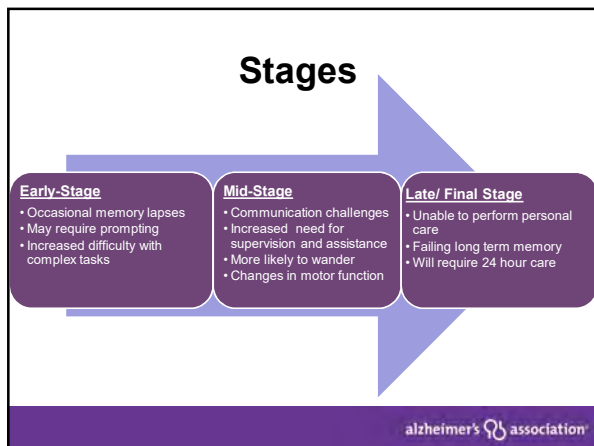
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### How Alzheimer's Affects Families

- Increases Isolation
- Suffer from Stress
- Stigma
- Overwhelming caregiving duties, often for many years

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### Memory Loss Changes Relationships

- Friends
- Co-workers
- Family Members
- Spouses

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**Key Concept #1**

Their Reality  
IS Reality



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**Reality Orientation Exercise**

- What do you THINK about what I am saying?
- What do you FEEL about what I am saying?

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**Key Concept #2**

- Reassure
- Redirect



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**BREAKING DOWN**



**COMMON BARRIERS**

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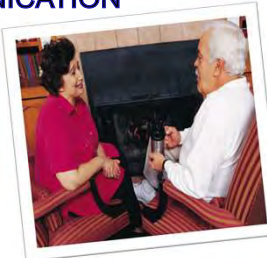
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**BARRIER:**  
**COMMUNICATION**

- Word Finding & Substitution
- Difficulty Organizing Thoughts
- Comprehension
- Indecision
- Hearing Problems



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**Strategy:**  
**Communication**

- Have the person's attention
- Speak face to face
- Be patient
- Speak slowly & clearly
- Use short simple sentences
- Allow ample time for responses
- Use visual cues, gestures & touch

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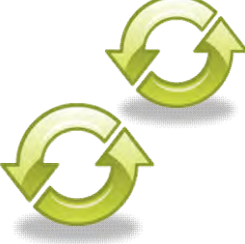
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**BARRIER:  
REPETITION**

- Verbal
- Movements



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**Strategy:  
Repetition**

- Cause/Trigger
- Focus on Emotion
- Answer the same way each time
- Turn into an activity
- Stay calm
- Reassure



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**BARRIER:  
BEHAVIORS**

- Physical
- Overstimulation
- Unfamiliar Surroundings
- Complicated Tasks
- Frustration

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### Strategy: Behaviors

- Identify What is the Cause
- Focus on Feelings Instead of Facts
- Remain Calm and Positive
- Limit Distractions
- Shift the Focus



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### BARRIER: FEAR & ANXIETY

- Suspicions
- Accusations
- Paranoia



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### Strategy: Fear & Anxiety



- Validate accusation
- Go along with suspicion & accusations
- Don't argue

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**BARRIER:**  
**ROUTINE & INITIATION**

- Changes in Routine
- Changes in Energy levels
- Changes in Initiation



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**Strategy:**  
**Routine & Initiation**

- Make a New Routine
- Be Aware of Energy Changes
- Anticipate Lower Initiation Behavior



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**BARRIER:**  
**SENSORY OVERLOAD**

- Too Many People
- Too Much Noise
- Overstimulation



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### Strategy: Sensory Overload



- Limit Number of People
- Turn off the TV and Radio
  - Put the barking dog outside
  - Close the window
- Offer Fewer Choices

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### The Importance of Activities



- Self Esteem
- Sense of Dignity
- Meaningful
- Purposeful

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### Activities Strategies

- Consider person's likes and dislikes
- Consider remaining abilities
- Be flexible and ready to shift gears
- Encourage involvement in daily life – set the table, empty garbage, etc.
- Break down tasks into manageable chunks
- Don't criticize
- Sense of meaning and purpose

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## Recap

We now know:

- how Alzheimer's changes the brain
- the impact on relationships
- common challenges
- skills to connect meaningfully



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## Resources

24/7 Nationwide  
Helpline: 800.272.3900

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THE BRAINS BEHIND SAVING YOURS

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ALZ.org  
CommunityResourceFinder.org  
ALZ.org/CRF

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# Learning to Connect: Relating to the Person with Alzheimer's



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