

Tips for caregivers coping with Alzheimer's during COVID-19 pandemic

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With the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, many caregivers of loved ones living with Alzheimer's disease and/or related dementias (ADRD) are experiencing unique challenges. Lisa Wiese, Ph.D., an

assistant professor, and María de los Ángeles Ordóñez, DNP, APRN, GNP-BC, PMHNP-BC, FAANP, FAAN, an associate professor and director of the Louis and Anne Green Memory & Wellness Center, both at Florida Atlantic University's Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing, provide several coping and care strategies for caregivers to help sustain their health as well as the health of those in their care during the quarantine associated with COVID-19.

In addition, caregivers who need guidance and support can contact FAU's Louis and Anne Green Memory & Wellness Center at 561-297-0502 to speak with staff members who are available to answer questions and share resources to assist caregivers and their loved ones.

Personal Care:

- Wash your hands before and after any interaction with your loved one, or any contact with outside persons or objects.
- Use an effective handwashing method: apply soap and water and scrub for at least 20 seconds, including between your fingers and on your palms, not just the top of your hands. Soap and water is best, but if it is not convenient, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Apply lotion to keep your skin from drying and cracking.
- Be aware of the signs of COVID-19 potential infection such as fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, and fatigue. Call your doctor/health care provider if a fever over 100.4°F is present (check your temperature daily). You also can follow the Infectious Disease Society of America's modified definition of fever for [older adults](#) as a helpful alternative: a single oral temperature over 100°F, or two oral repeated temperatures over 99°F or an increase in temperature of 2°F over the baseline temperature.
- Older adults, 65 and older, and individuals who have severe

underlying [medical conditions](#) like heart or lung disease or diabetes seem to be at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19 illness.

- ADRD-related behaviors, increased age and common health conditions that often accompany ADRD may increase risk for COVID-19. For example, people with ADRD may forget to wash their hands or take other recommended precautions to prevent illness.
- Increased confusion is often the first symptom of any illness in persons living with ADRD. If your loved one shows rapidly increased confusion, or any unusual change, contact your health care provider for advice.

Socializing:

- Stay away from public places. It is possible that individuals with COVID-19 may not have symptoms and therefore may be unaware that they have the virus and may spread it.
- Exercise! Take walks outside if possible. Play music and dance (without touching). Consider chair yoga exercises such as "[Sit 'N' Fit Chair Yoga](#)." Exercise is important to help prevent decline in health that creates new problems and may improve your mood.
- Call friends daily. Use FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, or other means that allow you all to "see" each other.
- Plan time for yourself when you can "retreat" into your own space. Perhaps during naptime, or before your loved one awakes, to do something you enjoy, that is not doing something for others.
- Read a story out-loud to your loved one.
- Most faith-based institutions are offering online church services. Check them out online.
- If possible, do projects with loved ones; clean out closets, work

on a puzzle, color or paint together.

Home Hygiene:

- Follow guidelines from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding cleaning in the house: clean all the surfaces daily that you touch in your home with 1 teaspoon of bleach per 1 cup of water. This includes the sink, cabinet, and refrigerator doors and handles, oven doors, microwave doors and handles, and other high-use surfaces daily.
- Change all hand towels and kitchen towels daily.
- Have tissues handy everywhere.
- Place signs in bathroom reminding your loved one to wash his/her hands.
- Do not share dishes, drinking glasses, or utensils.
- Open windows and doors if possible to allow fresh air in and to increase ventilation.
- Outside help coming into the home should be asked to wear gloves and a mask, and if possible, a gown, or ask them to change clothes in between clients.

Medical Care:

- If your pharmacy does not deliver, call another pharmacy that does, and ask them to help you with changing the prescriptions. Alternatively, use the Door Dash app; they are now delivering medications from your local pharmacy.
- Most providers are offering telehealth (medical visits over the phone) so you can call them. If you have any concerns about health issues, you also can call FAU's Louis and Anne Green Memory & Wellness Center at 561-297-0502.
- If you think you might have an emergency and cannot reach your

[health care provider](#), call your local hospital emergency room. They can connect you with a nurse or other provider who can help guide you as to the best course of action.

Provided by Florida Atlantic University

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