

function and give the caregiver a better idea of what's going on," says Dr. Landsverk. She notes that some people with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia are able to tell you when to take them to the bathroom, while others who aren't as aware of their body can't tell you and might have accidents. A regular bathroom routine—taking the person to the bathroom every couple of hours—can help steer the person clear of accidents.

Exercise can easily be worked into the daily routine and after breakfast is the perfect time for an outing, leaving enough time to head back home to refuel, rest and recharge.

It's important to stay active, says Dr. Landsverk. "Exercise is one of the few things that have been shown to either decrease the risk of dementia or decrease the progression of dementia," she explains. In an assisted living community for people with dementia Landsverk visited, the center played big band music to encourage the residents to move about. "People were getting up and dancing; things that you can do that are physical and social double the benefit."

Make it Person-Centered

While a routine can minimize confusion and anxiety in someone with Alzheimer's, keeping it patient-centered is imperative. That means scheduling activities when the patient is at his/her best. "If

someone is used to getting up at 10 am and having black coffee and their newspaper, you better not wake them at 8 am and give them coffee with cream and

sugar and turn the TV on," says Dr. Landsverk.

For social activities or outings, such as church, a visit with a friend or a doctor's appointment, it's good to keep the timing consistent. Heltemes advises figuring out the time when the person you're caring for is at his or her best, and always doing it then.

The caregiver should also note how the patient responds to a routine or activity, and modify as needed. A daily journal can be helpful in this regard. "If the caregiver wants to take them out shopping all day and isn't aware if they're tired, in pain or have had enough stimulation, they're going to have more agitation and battles," Dr. Landsverk says. Instead, she advises, go for an hour or two, or instead of the mall go to the grocery

store. "It goes back to person-centered care," she says. "You have to know what they enjoy and what works best for them."

To know whether a routine is working, you can expect to see less agitation and even moments of joy. "There rarely is a perfect day for a person with dementia and their caregiver, but if they have some smiles, moments of enjoying each other and getting past the bumps in the day, it's a good day and the routine is working OK," says Heltemes. ●



“Having a routine can make the day more manageable for both the caregiver and the person with dementia so they're not wondering what they're going to do with this long day.”

—Monica Heltemes