

ALZHEIMER'S AWARENESS MONTH TIPS

September is World Alzheimer's Month. According to the Alzheimer's Association, this form of dementia affects memory, thinking, and behavior. Symptoms eventually grow severe enough to interfere with daily tasks. Alzheimer's is the most common cause of memory loss worldwide.

With so many people in the world affected by this disease, education is critical for improving their quality of life. I have selected three ways that Providence Health Care has implemented change in our facility to help residents with cognitive loss. These tips are just the start of many changes that can be made to help your loved one live a happier and safer life.

The first tip is to focus on flooring in their environment. The Alzheimer's Society reports that people with dementia can experience visuo-perceptual difficulties, leading to misperceptions and distortions of reality. An example of this is a dark patch on a floor; this patch could be mistaken for a hole. Another example is a glossy surface that might be perceived as being wet. Even something small like changes in a surface can be mistaken for a change in levels.

At Providence Health Care, each floor was chosen to be dementia friendly. Using the right texture, pattern, and color can make a critical difference to the health and comfort of a person living with memory loss. Carpet patterns that are not overwhelming and are easy to follow are a good choice. If you have hard finished floors some items to avoid are sparkling resin finishes or natural stones with flecks. These can be distracting or even problematic as some people may try to pick the flecks off the floor, increasing fall risk. When flooring is done correctly it can achieve the positive outcome of creating easier navigation and reducing anxiety, stress, and the potential for slips and falls.

The second tip that we implement at PHC is the use of music. As a facility, we are certified Music and Memory providers. Music and Memory is a non-profit organization that helps individuals with a wide range of cognitive and physical conditions to engage with the world, ease pain, and reclaim their humanity through the use of personalized music playlists. The goal is to help those struggling with cognitive issues and challenges to reconnect through music-inspired memories.

A simple way to implement this in a home setting is creating a personalized playlist for your loved one and use it consistently for them to enjoy. This is a fun and engaging opportunity to create the playlist while taking the time to understand your loved one's memories and history that is connected to each song. When a loved one is having a day where they are struggling more than normal, this is a good opportunity to set aside time to use the playlist to calm them.

Tip three is personalization. At PHC we encourage the personalization of rooms and doors. This makes it easier for individuals living with dementia to identify their room. Since objects tend to trigger memories, as opposed to colors, numbers, or words, this personalization can be very helpful. Memory boxes are a great way to individualize the entry to a room. These are simply boxes that contain small but meaningful items. Such objects can be comforting to the person while also creating a connection between their objects and their home. This can easily be done at home outside of your loved one's room or personal space. Another option is to add signage with pictures to make areas easily identifiable.

ALZHEIMER'S AWARENESS MONTH TIPS CONTINUED

Updating spaces for people with cognitive brain changes takes special consideration, extra time, and attention to detail, but it is well worth the effort. In these spaces, it's the little things that matter. As you take the time to implement some of the tips mentioned, be sure to slow down and understand how your loved one views the world, how they interact with it, and what they need to perform best in their life. Once you achieve that, you will be on the right track for creating a more enjoyable and safer space for both of you.

The Alzheimer's Association has a list of resources similar to this article that might be helpful for you or your loved ones.

https://www.alz.org/help-support/resources/virtual_library/resource_lists

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