Caregiving Session 7 Dementia

Contributing Considerations to Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)

1. Poor vision
2. Hearing loss-you can't remember what you didn't hear
3. Medications-including over the counter drugs and supplements
4. Isolation and boredom
5. Illness and infection- Urinary Tract Infections (UTI)'s can often cause confusion in the elderly
6. High blood pressure and cholesterol
7. Vitamin deficiencies-particularly B12
8. Thyroid problems
9. Dehydration-common in the elderly They can lack a natural thirst as they age or may simply not want to get up to go to the bathroom
10. Use of alcohol or tobacco
11. Depression-can be common in the elderly
12. Stress and anxiety
13. Insomnia and sleep apnea

Things That May Help

1. Be patient-give them time and know that is not their fault
2. Use reminders-calendars, alarms, labels, notes and lists, help them with coping techniques
3. Keep important information close-addresses and phone numbers in their wallet, purse or in their phone
4. Find some humor-Worrying about the loss constantly will only make it worse for everyone

Symptoms of Dementia

1. Memory Loss-The hallmark of dementia is severe memory loss (especially short term memory)
2. Confusion- Everyday or simple tasks become challenging (Cleaning, following a recipe or paying bills)
3. Disorientation- People get lost in familiar places or can't remember how they got there
4. Losing Things-No ability to retrace their steps. As if something had vanished (They may be hiding things)
5. Poor Grooming- Personal hygiene is neglected or clothes may be dirty or not appropriate for the weather. Can develop a fear of water or bathing. They may be more sensitive to the cold so try to keep the bathroom warm.
6. Personality Changes- Uncharacteristically angry, agitated, fearful, rude or worried
7. Language Difficulty- May not use the correct words or may garble words
8. Math and Money Problems- Counting, calculating a tip, or balancing a checkbook is challenging
9. Poor Judgement- Making unwise, unsafe or unusual decisions. This may make them more susceptible to fraud or poor financial decisions
10. Time Confusion- Confusion about the day, month or year or how long ago something happened. Or a visit that is in the future. Sometimes just looking at the clock and having no idea what it means. The ability to read a digital clock may remain longer than the ability to read an analog clock.

11. Repetition- Saying or doing the same thing over and over
12. Visual and Spacial Challenges- Difficulty judging distances or seeing contrasts clearly. Not being able to judge the distance from the curb to the ground.
13. Trouble Concentrating- Struggling to follow a conversation or to get lost while telling a story.
14. Withdrawal- For all of the above reasons a person with dementia may decline invitations and avoid social situations.

Things to Avoid

1. Correcting them- This can be confrontational It's common early on to think that if you remind them that they will remember.
2. Moving their residence- This is very disorienting and can cause extreme anxiety or a decline in health. Move them as seldom as possible. Think about this when placing someone early in the process. What happens if your loved one starts to wander? Does the facility have a memory care unit? Will their needs be met by the staff and the facility as their needs increase?
3. Rushing them- This can be confusing and stressful for them- You need to arrive earlier so you are calmer and less stressed.
4. Changes in their routine- There is security in having a routine. Once things are placed in the room and are comfortable for them then don't move things around.
5. Don't over clutter their room- Try to set it up in a familiar and comforting way without a lot of knick knacks. This can make identifying things difficult for them.
6. Too much noise- This can cause agitation even if it's music or a T.V. show they used to enjoy. This can also change in time.
7. Too little light- Particularly late in the day if sundowning is a problem. Sundowning is a symptom of dementia that causes more confusion in the late afternoon or evening. It can be exacerbated by being tired or too little light.

Try these tips for sundowning:

A. Increase light later in the day-Consider full spectrum lights or using brighter lighting when they are more agitated or confused.
B. Keep them active-Reduce daytime napping so they rest better and more fully at night.
C. Adjust eating patterns- Large meals can can increase agitation as well as caffeine or alcohol. Keep evening meals light or a healthy snack if needed.
D. Minimize stress- Stick to calm activities such as relaxing music or a light hand massage or petting a loved animal. T.V. can be too stressful for many.
E. Provide comfort and familiarity- Surround with comforting items such as a favorite blanket, or a family photo
F. Track their Behavior-Keep a journal of things that increase agitation and things that help calm them.
G. Keep yourself healthy and rested- If you are calm and relaxed and not showing signs of stress or being rushed, it will help your loved one.

Things To Do

1. Be flexible- If your loved one is having a bad day try to adjust the schedule to accommodate their needs.
2. Be Patient- Listen carefully to what they are telling you. Much like a healthy person they have a need to be heard and understood. What they are experiencing is very real and they are trying to communicate their reality to you. Don't correct them.
3. Leave your own cares at the door- Bring your best self into their world. They sense your stress and know when you are upset. This can add to their agitation.
4. Remind them of good times and memories- Share a photo album or a story they like and remember. Continue to make memories with them even in these difficult days.
5. Let them do things that they still can do- Folding towels, singing old songs or playing an instrument. Anything that brings comfort
6. Tell them you love them- This may bring a peace and wonderful moment for both of you
7. Remain calm and reassuring- And when you don't please forgive yourself.

Things to Consider

1. Reason and Logic don't work- Recognize that things that make sense to you don't make sense to them.
2. Living independently may not be safe or possible- There can be hazards in daily tasks.
3. The Truth is not always best- This must be accepted and realized as your loved one progresses.
4. Keep a journal- Have every person who deals with your loved one add notes. This will keep you current on anything that happens when you are not there.
5. Distract and redirect unpleasant or repetitive behavior-suggest going for a cup of coco or play a simple game or puzzle to help them move on. Sometimes a simple touch on their arm will help them be calm and more present.
6. Consider new types of technology- Virtual reality has shown progress in helping with depression in dementia patients. Music has shown amazing results in helping brain function. Stay educated and on top of new ideas that might help.
7. What works today may not work tomorrow- Don't get attached to certain resolutions or soothing techniques. They may change frequently
8. Protect them-Be aware of visitors and how they interact with your loved one. Help them understand your loved ones limitations.
9. Don't use their lack of memory as an excuse to not visit- They live in the moment so every moment that you are there is precious whether they remember it later or not-you will remember.
10. Get help and support- As your loved ones need increase you may need to bring on additional help. Think about a counselor, psychologist or a support group for you. Think about bringing in others to provide care for your loved one. You can't do everything. Don't feel guilty for providing outside care so you can bring your best self to this task.