

This episode of *The Alzheimer's Podcast* is about how coronavirus, or COVID-19, could impact your loved one living with dementia. Although the Dementia Sherpa tribe got an email with a lot of this information on Saturday, I'm expanding and including more for this episode of *The Alzheimer's Podcast*.

If you've been following the story of coronavirus spread over the past several weeks, you may be freaked out right about now. News came out over the weekend that a long-term care community in the Pacific Northwest has been impacted, with both residents and staff affected. As I'm recording this the morning of March 3, 2020, 4 residents of that nursing home have died.

So even if you're a cool kitten not prone to panic, you may have questions about how the spread of coronavirus could affect your person.

Looking at COVID-19 through a dementia lens, here are some important things to keep in mind:

- Your person's brain is under attack on any given day. Because the brain is the command center for the rest of the body, this includes the immune system. When you read/hear warnings for people with compromised immune systems, this includes your person.
- Please don't assume your person washes their hands unless you or another trusted source observes it happening. Making sure hand washing happens (for at least 20 seconds, with soap) is your easiest, best way to help protect your person.
- People living with dementia are virtually certain to forget to cover their cough/sneeze and to not touch their eyes, nose, and mouth--so please don't count on that as a way to prevent transmission. Instead, go back to hand washing.
- For people living in a long-term care community, one of the biggest threats to their health is visitors coming through the door who aren't following basic health safety protocol for any situation.
 - What I mean by that is if you are coughing or sneezing, please don't come visit. If you have a cold, please don't come visit. If you have flu symptoms, please don't come visit. If you have a fever, please don't come visit. If you've been vomiting, please don't come visit.
 - I understand the need to make sure your person is okay. Call your person's community to get status updates on them. Send them a postcard or note in

the mail to let them know you're thinking about them. Call them on the phone.

- And even if you're feeling healthier than you've ever felt in your entire life, please wash your hands! Use the hand sanitizer station at the entrance to the community. Use the one in the lobby. Use the one in the hall. Most communities have hand sanitizer stations throughout the building.

If you're caring for your person in your own home, here are some other ways to help support your person's immune system include:

- Offering healthful meals with plenty of Vitamin C throughout the day. Because Vitamin C is water-soluble, "just taking a pill" isn't advisable; it'll be gone after the first pee or two.
- Encouraging lots of water throughout the day. Make it more fun for taste buds by tossing in a slice of cucumber or sprig of mint or sliced strawberries, etc.
- Exercise with your person. This could be a walk around the block or around the yard, or chair exercises.
- Promoting a restful, comfy, dark, cool environment for sleeping. Sleep is very important for good brain health.

Whether it's COVID-19, flu, pneumonia, or a plain old run of the mill cold, protecting and supporting your person's immune system is the name of the game.

Two big components of my job as The Dementia Sherpa are helping you plan for the future and pointing out potholes for you to avoid along the way. In that spirit, let's touch on what you can do to be prepared if your person lives with you and "social distancing" (also known as staying away from others) is being recommended in your area.

In other words, what's your plan if you and your person are in the house together for a couple weeks and you can't go anywhere or receive visitors? This is otherwise known as cabin fever, and routinely strikes every winter, depending on where you live.

Presumably, your pantry is well-stocked with non-perishable foods, your medicine cabinet has a first aid kit and cold and flu remedies, and you've got plenty of toilet paper, soap--and incontinence supplies, if applicable.

Next, let's assume you've got plenty of household cleaners to make sure surfaces are safe to touch.

Now let's focus on how you and your person are going to spend your days. One of the easiest (but often overlooked) ways to have a great day with your person no matter what's going on outside your home is to include your person in household tasks throughout the day. Depending on where your person is in the disease process and their ability level, include them in dusting, vacuuming, loading the dishwasher, sorting laundry, folding laundry, sweeping, and meal prep.

This gives your person a sense of purpose and feeling of achievement, which is important for maintaining feelings of self-worth and self-esteem.

Of course, all work and no play isn't very fun, and I'm a big proponent of having fun with your person! You can play games together, like checkers or Connect Four, Go Fish!, Old Maid, or Uno.

One popular game we played a lot in memory care was with a plain deck of cards. Flip over the first card. Let's say it's a jack. Then flip over the next card. Let's say it's a five. Your person tells you if the card you just flipped over is higher or lower than the previous one. If your person is higher functioning, you can incorporate suits or colors, as well.

Another popular program we did was taste testing various teas. Which one tastes best? Why do you like it best? You can do this with pretty much anything you can compare. This is also a great way to add in reminiscence therapy: point to a picture of a happy time together, let's say a trip to the Grand Canyon. Recall how you felt and invite your person to share how they felt. Serve a dish that you had on the trip. Make a playlist of music you listened to on that road trip.

Playing with pets is a fun way to spend time together, too. The one thing I'd encourage staying away from is television, unless we're talking something classic with guaranteed laughs like *The Carol Burnett Show* or *I Love Lucy*.

Scripted tv shows, especially dramas, are difficult to follow from scene to scene. And the maxim in the news business is 'if it bleeds, it leads.' Having the news on for "background noise" isn't a good idea. But playing music, having a dance party, can be a lot of fun. It gets you both moving and can elicit positive feelings and memories.

For more resources, please go to the show notes at DementiaSherpa.com/Episode131. There, you'll find links to more on the coronavirus, as well as activities ideas for your person.

- The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC): [Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#).
- *The Washington Post* online: [How to prepare for coronavirus in the U.S. \(Spoiler: Not sick? No need to wear a mask.\) Printable version.](#)
- *The Daily* podcast by *The New York Times*: [The Coronavirus Goes Global](#).
- 101 Things to Do with a Person Living with Dementia
- The Dementia Sherpa Playlist, Part 1
- The Dementia Sherpa Playlist, Part 2

I'll end our show with a reminder: the most contagious thing to come into contact with our person is always our energy. If we're bubbling with fear and anxiety, that's what we're sharing with our person. So, instead make sure to bring lots of The Good Stuff to share.

And I'm sending *you* a whopping dose of The Good Stuff right now.