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Program in St. Louis Helps People with Alzheimer's Disease

Memory Care Home Solutions Teaches Coping Strategies to Caregivers

By **Walt Crocker**

I'm having lunch with my neighbor friend Mary. Mary is about 75 years old and still going strong. The lumps in her knuckles show 50 years of repetitious hard work in bars and restaurants. Other than taking a couple of aspirins when her arthritis kicks up, she is in good health and still working every day. Because her husband, who passed away a few years ago, was unable to work most of the time, Mary held two jobs most of her life. They were minimum wage jobs working as a waitress and in fast food joints, but she was able to save enough money to buy a new house in the county and a smaller house out in the country and still have some money put back for her retirement. She looks up from her coffee and sandwich and tells me that her friend Reba isn't doing so well. "She's got the "old timers" disease." She says in her southern drawl. Mary was one of the sweetest people I've ever met, but she never really had a good command of the language, once referring to her new car as having "fuel congestion" instead of a carburetor.

What Mary was referring to was, of course, Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's affects some 4.5 million people in the United States, most of them over the age of 65. The average brain has some 100 billion nerve cells, a 100 trillion synapses, and dozens of neurotransmitters. Over time, our experiences create patterns in these nerve cells. These patterns explain how we code our thoughts, memories, skills, and the sense of who we are. Alzheimer's disease leads to nerve cell death and tissue loss throughout the brain. Over time, plaques form, and the brain shrinks dramatically, tragically affecting nearly all of its functions. The dead and dying nerve cells contain twisted strands of protein called tangles. Scientists are not sure what causes cell death and tissue loss, but plaques and tangles are prime suspects.

Though nothing can be done about the slow progression of the disease, staying at home in a familiar place with familiar faces makes therapeutic sense. Through hands-on training, home visits, and individually tailored home care strategies, the Memory Care Home Solutions program here in St. Louis teaches coping strategies to caregivers. Its goal is to reduce stress for the caregivers, transform homes into healthy and safe places for people with memory loss; promote their independence; improve communication and reduce emergency room visits.

The program features remodeling a room in the house with devices and gadgets that can make life easier for a patient with Alzheimer's. Then a comprehensive written plan for care is formulated. There are training sessions for caregivers that improve communications and involve loved ones in daily activities, as well as follow-up visits by staff on a regular basis.

The diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease in a loved one is tragic, but with the Memory Care Home Solutions program, quality of life can be much improved for the patient as well as the caregiver. Memory Care Home Solutions is located at 10784 Indian Head Industrial Blvd. In St. Louis, telephone number is (314) 426-6247.

Takeaways

- ✚ Alzheimer's disease leads to nerve cell death and tissue loss throughout the brain.
- ✚ Staying at home in familiar surroundings with familiar faces makes therapeutic sense.
- ✚ The Memory Care Home Solutions program helps both patient and caregiver cope with the disease.

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