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Outdoors has special meaning for those with Alzheimer's disease

Submitted story

Most of us enjoy being outside on a regular basis ... To feel the sun on our faces and the breeze on our skin, to enjoy the sounds of the birds, to catch a glimpse of nature, to plant something and nurture its growth.

Whatever facets we enjoy, being outdoors regularly is felt to be necessity to many of us. This feeling is no less poignant to many experiencing the challenges of Alzheimer's disease as it is to those of us without such challenges. Indeed, it may be integral in maintaining a health quality of life.

It is commonly recognized that those who experience Alzheimer's disease, and related memory challenges, tend to feel more secure and experience less anxiety if they are able to engage in tasks with which they are familiar. Therefore, if a person has enjoyed life-long outdoor activities such as walking, bird watching or gardening there is a great likelihood that he/she will still enjoy these pastimes while living with Alzheimer's disease. Indeed, it may help bring a sense of familiarity and normalcy to the individual who may feel frequently confused or disoriented as a result of a cementing disease.

Time outdoors will also help those with Alzheimer's remain connected to the world around them.

There is also established research that indicates being outdoors can have farther reaching outcomes than purely enjoyment for people living with Alzheimer's disease. For example, a study published in *Biological Psychiatry* (1996) implied that individuals with Alzheimer's disease slept better at night when they were exposed to higher amounts of light and daytime activity than those who were not similarly exposed. It is also a well known fact that exposure to sunlight for brief periods of time promotes the absorption of Vitamin D, which is important for the maintenance of strong bones.

Of course, as Alzheimer's disease progresses, further steps will need to be taken to provide for the safety of the individual while outside. Adaptations, such as raised gardening boxes, smooth pathways or easily reached animal feeders may have to be made to ensure successful nature encounters. However, with the proper supervision there is no reason why such persons cannot continue to enjoy prize winning rose bushes, abundant, vegetable gardens, or simply basking in the warmth of radiant sun.

At Valley View Healthcare Center, we recognize the importance of our residents being encouraged to spend time outdoors on a regular basis. Activities such as those mentioned above are offered daily, as weather permits, as part of our mission to maximize the quality of life for our Memory Care residents.

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