

Helping A Person With Dementia: Care Instructions



Your Care Instructions

Dementia is a loss of mental skills that affects daily life. It is different from mild memory loss that occurs with aging. Dementia can cause problems with memory, thinking clearly, and planning. It is different for everyone. But it usually gets worse slowly. Some people who have dementia can function well for a long time. But at some point it may become hard for the person to care for himself or herself.

It can be upsetting to learn that a loved one has this condition. You may be afraid and worried about what will happen. You may wonder how you will care for the person. There is no cure for dementia. But medicine may be able to slow memory loss and improve thinking for a while. Other medicines may help with sleep, depression, and behavior changes.

Dementia is different for everyone. In some cases, people can function well for a long time. You can help your loved one by making his or her home life easier and safer. You also need to take care of yourself. Caregiving can be stressful. But support is available to help you and give you a break when you need it.

The Alzheimer's Association offers good information and support. If you are caring for someone with dementia, you can help make life safer and more comfortable. You can also help your loved one make decisions about future care. You may also want to bring up legal and financial issues. These are hard but important conversations to have.

Follow-up care is a key part of your loved one's treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if your loved one is having problems. It's also a good idea to know your loved one's test results and keep a list of the medicines he or she takes.

How can you care for your loved one at home?

Taking care of the person

- If the person takes medicine for dementia, help him or her take it exactly as prescribed. Call the doctor if you notice any problems with the medicine.
- Make a list of the person's medicines. Review it with all of his or her doctors.
- Help the person eat a balanced diet. Serve plenty of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables every day. If the person is not hungry at mealtimes, give snacks at midmorning and in the afternoon. Offer drinks such as Boost, Ensure, or Sustacal if the person is losing weight.
- Encourage exercise. Walking and other activities may slow the decline of mental ability. Help the person stay active mentally with reading, crossword puzzles, or other hobbies.
- Talk openly with the doctor about any behavior changes. Many people who have dementia become easily upset or agitated or feel worried. There are many things that can cause this, such as medicine side effects, confusion, and pain. It may be helpful to:
 - Keep distractions to a minimum. It may also help to keep noise levels low and voices quiet.
 - Develop simple daily routines for bathing, dressing, and other activities. And remind your loved one often about upcoming changes to the daily routine, such as trips or appointments.
 - Ask what is upsetting him or her. Keep in mind that people who have dementia don't always know why they are upset.
- Take steps to help if the person is sundowning. This is the restless behavior and trouble with sleeping that may occur in late afternoon and at night. Try not to let the person nap during the day. Offer a glass of warm milk or caffeine-free tea before bedtime.
- Be patient. A task may take the person longer than it used to.
- For as long as he or she is able, allow your loved one to make decisions about activities, food, clothing, and other choices. Let him or her be independent, even if tasks take more time or are not done perfectly. Tailor tasks to the person's abilities. For example, if cooking is no longer safe, ask for other help. Your loved one can help set the table, or make simple dishes such as a salad. When the person needs help, offer it gently.

Staying safe

- Make your home (or your loved one's home) safe. Tack down rugs, and put no-slip tape in the tub. Install handrails, and put safety switches on stoves and appliances. Keep rooms free of clutter. Make sure walkways around furniture are clear. Do not move furniture around, because the person may become confused.
- Use locks on doors and cupboards. Lock up knives, scissors, medicines, cleaning supplies, and other dangerous things.
- Do not let the person drive or cook if he or she can't do it safely. A person with dementia should not drive unless he or she is able to pass an on-road driving test. Your state driver's license bureau can do a driving test if there is any question.
- Get medical alert jewelry for the person so that you can be contacted if he or she wanders away. If possible, provide a safe place for wandering, such as an enclosed yard or garden.

Taking care of yourself

- Ask your doctor about support groups and other resources in your area.
- Take care of your health. Be sure to eat healthy foods and get enough rest and exercise.

- Take time for yourself. Respite services provide someone to stay with the person for a short time while you get out of the house for a few hours.
- Make time for an activity that you enjoy. Read, listen to music, paint, do crafts, or play an instrument, even if it's only for a few minutes a day.
- Spend time with family, friends, and others in your support system.

When should you call for help?



Call 911 anytime you think the person may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- The person who has dementia wanders away and you can't find him or her.
- The person who has dementia is seriously injured.

Call the doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- The person suddenly sees things that are not there (hallucinates).
- The person has a sudden change in his or her behavior.

Watch closely for changes in the person's health, and be sure to contact the doctor if:

- The person has symptoms that could cause injury.
- The person has problems with his or her medicine.
- You need more information to care for a person with dementia.
- You need respite care so you can take a break.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/patiented>

Enter **B382** in the search box to learn more about "**Helping A Person With Dementia: Care Instructions**".

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