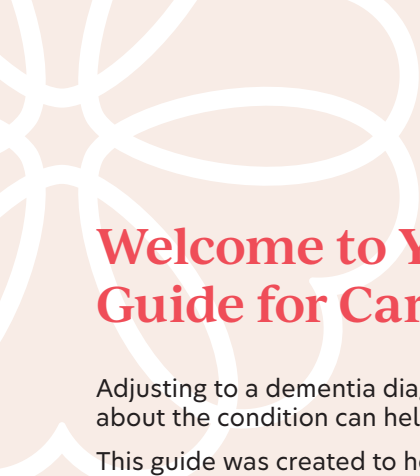


Dementia Care

A guide for caregivers & families



DovidaTM
Your Life, Your Way



Welcome to Your Dementia Guide for Caregivers & Families

Adjusting to a dementia diagnosis can take time, but understanding more about the condition can help.

This guide was created to help people understand more about dementia and to provide information on caring for someone living with the disease. It:

- Explains what dementia is and how it may affect people
- Suggests ways a caregiver can provide practical support, including making home adaptations
- Provides guidance about how to live well with the condition
- Provides communication tips and suggests activities specific to supporting people with dementia
- Includes information about where to find additional resources for caregivers



Dovida recognizes that your uniqueness is key to providing the highest quality of care. With you at the center of everything we do, we help you live the life you want in the comfort of your own home for as long as possible.

We provide a range of services including companionship, domestic assistance, personal care, meal preparation, medication reminders, and transport to appointments, shopping, and social outings. Care is available from two hours to 24 hours a day and includes dementia care and palliative care.

For more information, visit dovida.com.

Dementia Care

Table of Contents

What is Dementia	2
Symptoms	4
Timely Diagnosis and Treatment Options	6
Stages of Dementia	8
Living Well with Dementia	9
How To Support a Person Living with Dementia	20
Ways of Providing Person-Centered Care	21
Communicating Effectively	23
Understanding Behavioral Symptoms	26
Need More Help	30





What is Dementia

Dementia describes a collection of symptoms caused by disorders affecting the brain. It is a progressive disease and the effects of dementia vary from person to person, but generally, dementia affects mood, memory, thinking ability, personality and behavior.

An estimated 6.9 million Americans age 65 and older are living with dementia — about 1 in 9 people in that age group. Dementia is also a leading cause of disability among older adults, and the risk rises sharply with age: about 1 in 3 Americans over 85 has dementia. (Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures, 2024)

However, dementia is not a normal part of the aging process. While age is a risk factor, dementia can affect adults of all ages. Younger-onset dementia (or early-onset dementia) affects an estimated 200,000 Americans in their 30s, 40s, and 50s. (Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures, 2024).

What causes dementia

Dementia is caused by physical changes in the brain, such as the buildup of abnormal proteins or damage to brain cells.

There is currently no cure for dementia, however, there are treatments and strategies that can help manage symptoms and maintain quality of life.

Types of dementia

Dementia is an umbrella term that describes the symptoms of a large group of degenerative diseases of the brain. There are over 100 different types of dementia, each with its own unique characteristics and causes. The most common forms of dementia are Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

Alzheimer's disease

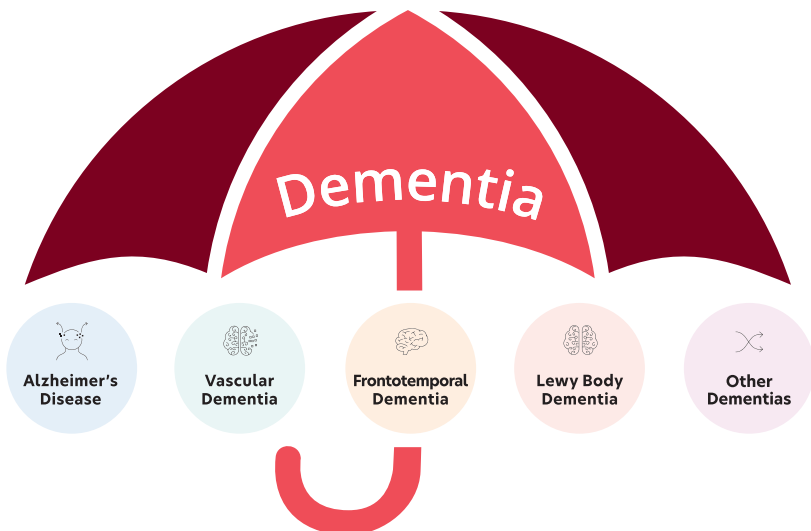
Is the most common form and the most widely known dementia. It accounts for between 50-70% of all diagnoses. Alzheimer's disease occurs when the nerve cells deteriorate in the brain due to a build-up of plaques and tangles which results in the death of a large number of brain cells over a period of time.

Vascular dementia

Is the second most common form of dementia accounting for up to 20% of all dementia diagnoses. Vascular dementia is the broad term for dementia associated with problems arising from a lack of circulation of blood and oxygen to the brain. Risk factors associated with vascular dementia include high blood pressure and thickening of the arteries. Vascular dementia may appear similar to Alzheimer's disease, and it is possible to have both Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

There are many other different, less common forms of dementia, such as, dementia with Lewy bodies, alcohol-related dementia (Korsakoff's syndrome), and frontotemporal dementia (often called frontal-lobe dementia). A thorough medical examination can assist in identifying the specific dementia diagnosis. Knowing the diagnosis can help family members better understand and cope with their situation.

Types of dementia





Symptoms of Dementia

Dementia symptoms are progressive and everyone with dementia will experience different symptoms, but the most common symptoms include:

Memory loss and misplacing things

This particularly affects short-term memory, so someone may find it harder to remember details from yesterday or earlier that day but have no problem recalling events from years ago, or may ask the same question repeatedly. For some people with dementia, they may lose or misplace items, they might put them in unusual places, or not remember how to use them.

Difficulty performing familiar tasks

Simple housework tasks may become difficult. For example, cooking or preparing a meal, then forgetting to serve it. Getting dressed or remembering which order to put clothes on may become more challenging.

Confusion about time and place

It may be hard to specify what day, year or time of day it is. People with dementia may find it hard to remember their address or find their way home, or they may not know where they are, even if they are at home.

Problems with language

Everyone may struggle to find the right word occasionally, but people with dementia may forget simple words and have trouble following a conversation or substitute unusual words that don't make sense in the context of the rest of the sentence. This can result in them becoming more withdrawn from their hobbies or social activities.



Changes in personality or behavior

People with dementia may experience rapid and extreme mood swings or irritability for no apparent reason. They may also show less emotion or be more anxious, sad, or frightened. There may be changes to their sleep patterns, or even delirium, hallucinations and depression. For some people, changed behaviors may indicate that the person is in pain or discomfort.

Problems with concentration, planning, or organizing

You may notice that a person with dementia finds it difficult to keep up with paying their bills or follow a familiar recipe. It may be more difficult to concentrate or may take longer to do tasks. Decision making abilities may be reduced, they may forget to attend important appointments, or use poor judgement, particularly in relation to money, driving, or wearing inappropriate clothing for the weather. A person living with dementia may become passive and disinterested, particularly in household tasks or social engagements.

Trouble with images or spatial information

People with dementia may have trouble judging distances, depth perception, and seeing some objects in three dimensions. This may affect their balance. They may also struggle with determining color or contrast, particularly with heavily patterned items such as carpets and rugs, or between food and the plate.



Timely Diagnosis and Treatment Options

Many people become forgetful as they age, for example walking into a room and forgetting why they went in there. However, a person showing signs of dementia might walk into the room and have trouble remembering whose house they are in, or why.

If you or a loved one are experiencing more than just age-related memory loss, it's important to discuss any concerns with a primary care physician. If you've noticed warning signs in someone else, try to gently suggest a doctor's visit. They might not want to go so try to be calm, caring, and provide reassurance. If this is unsuccessful, consider suggesting a visit to a doctor for another reason such as a regular check-up. Try to make sure it's a real reason however and don't make anything up.



Getting diagnosed

Primary care physicians will seek to understand more about the changes the patient is experiencing, and may ask when they started, what the changes are, and if they're getting worse. There are many non-dementia-related reasons for memory loss or confusion, so it's important to rule these out first.

The doctor may then refer to a specialist such as a Neurologist or Geriatrician who will perform cognitive tests to understand any changes in thinking abilities, concentration, spatial awareness, problem-solving, and language. Brain scans, MRIs, and CT scans may also be used to detect any changes and to identify other conditions such as strokes or brain tumors.

Timely diagnosis

While it might be scary or daunting, receiving a diagnosis can explain the symptoms being experienced and provides the opportunity for someone to understand more about the condition and how it may progress. Medication can help to manage or alleviate symptoms. Early detection can help people find the right support and advice that will promote wellbeing and enhance their quality of life.

It may also help the individual with dementia to make and communicate preparations for their own future before the condition progresses. This may include making financial arrangements, communicating any health and care plans, making a will, and deciding on a power of attorney or durable power of attorney to help you make any health and financial decisions. Depending on factors such as your age, income, and the severity of your diagnosis, you may be eligible for government assistance programs to help cover the cost of care.

Treatment options

There is no cure for dementia, however, with the right care and support, someone can live as well as possible for as long as possible. Medications currently cannot stop, slow down or reverse dementia, however they can help with some of the symptoms. Person-centered care can help someone to live well with their dementia.

Stages of Dementia

Every person with dementia is unique, and no two people have the same symptoms or will experience changes at the same rate. Someone's abilities may change from day to day, or even within the same day. Dementia will cause cognitive decline, sometimes rapidly over a few months or in other cases more slowly and gradually over a number of years.

The early stages of dementia are often only apparent in hindsight. At the time it may be missed, or put down to old age, or overwork. The onset of dementia is usually very gradual, and it is often impossible to identify the exact time it began. In this stage, people with dementia retain some insight into their situation, but become more confused and forgetful. They may begin to lose language skills, have trouble handling money and paying bills, forget once familiar tasks, and may experience personality changes.

The middle stages of dementia are when the problems of memory loss or confusion become more apparent, and have a greater impact on a person's ability to maintain their independence. They may forget or not recognize family and friends, repeat themselves often, and have problems sequencing tasks like putting on clothes or the steps required to take a shower or prepare a meal.

The later stages of dementia are when the condition will have affected most aspects of a person's life. They will eventually need full-time care and support to manage activities of daily living including personal care, eating, washing, and dressing.

Maintaining social connection is important at all stages of the dementia journey, but it is a key intervention during the middle stages.

Structuring the day, arranging activities, and preventing isolation are important goals.

It is important to remember that not every person with dementia will go through every stage. However, these three stages provide a useful description of the general progression of the disease.



Living Well With Dementia

Nutrition and food after a dementia diagnosis

Nearly half of all people diagnosed with dementia lose weight in the year prior to their diagnosis, with that loss contributing to frailty, falls and poor health.* Understanding and supporting nutrition needs following a diagnosis is essential to maximizing physical and cognitive capacity as well as supporting quality of life.

How dementia impacts eating:

Accessing, recognizing, preparing and eating food safely relies on complex brain processing which is impacted by dementia.

The nutrition needed to fuel and protect the body and brain, fight illness and infections and maintain good physical health doesn't change. Therefore, caregivers and family members have a vital role to play in assisting a person living with dementia to eat well, despite any cognitive challenges they might face.

*Nutrition and Dementia report by Alzheimer's Disease International, 2014.

Understanding that some of the following can occur due to dementia can help with meal preparation, planning and nutrition:

- Often a person with dementia either **won't feel hungry**, or is unable to express hunger adequately. Food refusal or not eating the food provided should not always be taken to mean "I'm not hungry." Instead, other steps need to be taken to ensure the individual is eating enough during the day.
- Sometimes **food is not recognized**, this can be because of the dementia, or due to modern interpretations of meals, drinks, and snacks which present food in new ways. Individuals who tend to reminisce about the past may find some food unrecognizable and not enticing. Make sure foods look appealing and recognizable when serving meals.
- The **complex planning** involved in purchasing, transporting, storing, preparing, and cooking foods, as well as serving meals and eating, can be impacted by dementia. An incorrect step or the wrong ingredients can unfortunately lead to a missed eating opportunity.
- **Confusion about how to eat** may be experienced by someone living with dementia. Even when food has been prepared by someone else, cutlery may not be recognized or the brain signal to start eating is absent or delayed, causing confusion around the meal.
- Individuals who are **distracted** by TV or other activity in the dining area may lose interest in eating or miss a meal altogether.
- **Swallowing issues** are very common with dementia, and as a result changes to the texture of food and drinks may be prescribed by a speech pathologist. Unfortunately, food modifications can eliminate some regularly enjoyed meals and this can often result in more food being refused and/or inadequate amounts eaten.

It is vital for a person with dementia to never miss an opportunity for nourishment and the pleasure of food. That can mean thinking outside the box to find solutions to support them with their nutritional needs.



Some suggestions to help combat food refusal are:

- Even if hunger is not expressed or is denied, continue to offer **light meals**, snacks, and drinks at the usual time. Indicate that now it is time to eat or drink and provide accordingly.
- When presenting food or drink, offer **encouragement** and a simple description.
- Sit and **share food and drinks** so that eating can be mimicked.
- Offer **foods that can be eaten with the fingers**, especially for those who don't like to sit for a long time. Eating with our hands is our earliest food experience. Ice cream cones, cubes of cheese, baked treats, carrots and celery sticks, cut fruits, and french fries are good alternatives, and can also bring joy as well as nutrition to a person with dementia.
- Ensuring **food contrasts well on the plate** can assist those with visual disturbances. Light-colored foods on darker plates, and darker foods on light plates may help.
- **Minimize distraction** in dining areas and ensure the room is set up properly to look like it's mealtime. Where possible, prepare and cook food to help tap into the person's memory of eating.

It is common for people living with dementia to develop preferences for sweeter or more salty foods than they previously had, to often choose unusual taste combinations or eat the same food at every meal. Fortifying preferred foods with nutritional powders, milk, other protein powders, or ground nuts can help to boost nutrition.

Dehydration is a significant issue in dementia, and can often contribute to confusion. Every cup of water, tea, or other drink matters. Regularly offer a variety of drinks to ensure hydration is maintained.



Exercise and dementia

As we age, exercise is important for health and wellbeing. This is particularly true for people living with dementia, plus it has also been linked to reducing the risk of developing dementia.

Exercise helps strengthen muscles and maintain balance which helps to reduce falls, supports mobility, improves mood, reduces feelings of stress, and depression, and helps blood flow to the brain. Gentle exercises such as yoga, swimming, gardening, walking, dancing, and water aerobics can be beneficial for someone living with dementia.

It is important to consider the age, abilities and type of dementia someone has, as well as their needs and preferences, before undertaking physical exercise. Ensure you speak to a doctor before starting an exercise program.





Staying connected

Maintaining social connection with others and engagement in the local community can help mental wellbeing. While dementia may affect the ability to verbally communicate with others, consider alternative methods like using pictures or cards that can be pointed at. Try building social connections into hobbies and leisure pursuits such as gardening, painting, and listening to music. With simple modifications, many people can continue to do things they enjoy despite their dementia diagnosis.

For some people with dementia, being among large groups of people can be noisy, overwhelming, or could cause feelings of anxiety or confusion. This can lead to social isolation and potential loneliness. To avoid this, spend time with smaller groups of people, and find a quiet place to talk.

Dementia support groups and alliances operate throughout the United States and provide the opportunity for people living with dementia, and their friends and family, to share experiences and connect with people also experiencing a similar journey. Visit the Alzheimer's Association ([alz.org](https://www.alz.org)) for information, help, and support services.

When someone is living with dementia, their holistic wellbeing must be considered. This means engaging in meaningful activities that support an individual's emotional, social, physical, spiritual, and environmental wellbeing. Consider what activities someone enjoys or previously enjoyed, their opinions and beliefs, and try to incorporate these into their day-to-day activities. For example, if someone previously enjoyed baking, spend time together making cookies. If someone enjoyed being in nature, take a walk in a local park or visit a garden center. For someone who previously enjoyed going to church every week but is no longer able to, consider a way you can replicate this at home with an online service or singing hymns together. This will help you to achieve meaningful interactions with your loved one.



Adapting the home

Dementia may affect a person's perception of their home environment and may alter their ability to maintain daily routines and activities. By making a few adaptations around the home, it can help individuals to live well and independently at home, feeling safe and secure in a familiar place.

Consider the following modifications to make a home more dementia friendly:

- **Avoid patterns** on carpet, wallpaper, tablecloths, bedding, or furnishings as these can be confusing, try to stick to plain colors. Use contrasting colors for floors, walls, and furnishings, to help identify them.
- Place frequently used items **in the line of sight** and at an accessible height, or group common items together. For example, tea, coffee, sugar, and mugs in the kitchen, or the toothbrush, toothpaste, and mouthwash in the bathroom.
- **Remove clutter**, excessive furniture, and trip hazards (such as rugs) to ensure clear pathways.
- Consider **automatic shut-off devices** for power or gas supplies to prevent fires. Install thermostat or hot water cut-off devices to regulate and monitor hot water temperature.
- Utilize **door and window sensors/monitors** to help identify if a person is leaving the house unexpectedly.

For additional ways to adapt a home and make it more accessible for someone living with dementia, consider downloading the Alzheimer's Foundation of America's free guide to creating a dementia-friendly home at: alzfdn.org/theapartment/.

Lighting:

- Use large light switches that contrast with the wall. Consider automatic night lights or sensor lighting, which can reduce the risk of falls at night.
- Keep areas well-lit and make use of natural light to help with general wellbeing.
- Open curtains and blinds fully to maximize daylight. Arrange furniture in a way that takes advantage of sunlight.
- Be aware of light reflecting on shiny surfaces like mirrors. It can be distracting and cause confusion.

Kitchen and dining room:

- Use transparent canisters with labels, add labels to cupboard doors, or replace/remove solid doors to easily view items.
- When replacing appliances, get new ones with a similar design so they are familiar.
- Consider using contrasting colors for items in table settings (such as placemats, plates, tablecloths, and glassware) to help identify them. Ensure plates are plain: It can be difficult to distinguish between a pattern on a plate and the food.
- Where needed, consider specialized cutlery and tableware developed to assist people during mealtimes.

Living room:

- Arrange a quiet space to sit, relax, or read with a sturdy table and raised comfortable chair that is easy to stand up from and sit in.
- Have games, jigsaw puzzles and photo albums available and set up areas for meaningful activities, favorite hobbies, or pastimes.

Bedroom:

- Use black-out curtains or blinds to regulate sleeping patterns and prevent shadows on windows from trees and shrubs outside.
- Label drawers and cupboards, or remove wardrobe doors to help with the identification of items.
- Consider using contrasting top and bottom bed sheets, to assist with getting into bed.
- Display a small selection of outfits and shoes to help decision-making and support independence.

Bathroom:

- Use contrasting colors to highlight items such as bath rails, door handles, and toilet seats.
- Ensure the room temperature is comfortable. Use taps that are familiar and easy to use.
- Consider covering or removing mirrors. Dementia can cause some people to not recognize their reflection in the mirror or understand what a reflection is.

Activities of daily living

As someone's dementia progresses, a person may need additional support with daily activities including getting dressed, cooking, bathing, etc.

If you are supporting someone with dementia to get washed or dressed, consider the following:

- **Allow plenty of time** to prevent rushing. For someone living with dementia, it may take longer to process information, and this affects the ability to make choices.
- **Simplify choices** so that they can make decisions rather than choosing for them. For example, ask them to choose between two tops that you've picked out, and encourage them to point to the one they prefer if verbal communication has become more difficult.
- Physical activities may become more difficult so try to **make this an enjoyable activity**. For example, a nice-smelling bubble bath can make washing feel like a luxury, rather than a chore.
- **Choose the time** of day that works best for when the person is most relaxed. If they resist your efforts to help, try again a little later.
- Focus on **what they can still do**, rather than what they can't. This will keep up their confidence, as well as skills. Be encouraging – for instance talking about how nice an item of clothing looks, or how warm the bath water feels.
- **Create a relaxed and safe environment** to make the person feel more comfortable and confident. Try to maintain privacy, respect their dignity, and ensure the room is warm. Consider covering mirrors before the person enters the bathroom. Some people with dementia find mirrors confusing as they are no longer able to recognize their own reflection.
- Choose a **well-lit room that is clutter-free** as this will help the person with dementia find what they need.
- **Be organized!** And ensure you have thought about where the person prefers to get undressed, when they like to get changed (eg. before breakfast or after), whether they prefer a bath or a shower, the toiletries they use, the dental care they need, their preferred style of dress, how they wear their hair and make-up, or whether they are usually clean-shaven. Get everything you need close at hand before you start, including the clothes they will change into after washing.

Research has shown that people with dementia benefit significantly from remaining in familiar surroundings for as long as possible.

To achieve this you may need the assistance of professional caregivers from Dovida.

Home care

For someone living with dementia, over time they may need more support to maintain independence at home. As a caregiver, supporting a person with dementia to wash, bathe, and dress can be emotionally and physically challenging, and looking after a person's personal care can be a big step in your caregiving role.

It is common to need extra emotional and practical support at this stage. Home care providers, such as Dovidia, can help with transport services, personal care, meal preparation, housekeeping, medication support, respite care, 24-hour care, dementia care, and palliative care.

Dovidia recognizes that a person's uniqueness is key to providing the highest quality of care. With our clients at the center of everything we do, we help them live the life they want in the comfort of their own home, for as long as possible.



Assistive technology

Adaptive tools and assistive technology – innovative devices designed to improve daily living – can enhance wellbeing and support a person's continued independence.

The type of devices or assistive technology a person with dementia may need will depend on their specific challenges. Occupational therapists, physical therapists and speech pathologists can evaluate individual needs and offer tailored assistive device recommendations.

These may include:

Mobility aids to help someone with mobility issues to maintain independence. These may include walkers or rollators, walking frames, or wheelchairs. Grab rails, hoists, and riser-recliner chairs may also be useful.

Movement sensors on beds, chairs, or doors can identify movement and help understand daily activity.

Kitchen aids such as tipper kettles and timers can help with everyday tasks.

Reminder devices

Some people living with dementia may have difficulty in telling the time or knowing the day of the week. Consider additional ways to help someone manage daily tasks:

- **Audio messages** can be played at set times during the day through mobile phones, tablets, and smart speakers to remind people to take medication. For example, "It is three o'clock and time to take your pill." Single or multiple messages can be recorded and set.
- **Location tracker tags** are small Bluetooth devices that can be attached to items like keys, wallets, purses, and glasses. You can use a smartphone to identify where these items are. These may be more suitable for friends and family members to use to support the person living with dementia.
- **Visual aids**, signs, and notices, including pictures, can help someone find items or rooms in the home, or prompt them about events or appointments. Whiteboards and calendar clocks may also be useful for orientation and important reminders.
- **Medication reminders and dispensers** can help people to take their medication correctly. For example, pill organizers, or Dosette boxes, with separate flip-top pill box compartments labelled with the time and/or day of the week or blister packs available from pharmacies. Automatic pill dispensers are also available and may have visual and sound prompts. Some people may be able to utilize medication management mobile phone apps.

For more information, visit the AT3 Center's searchable database of assistive technology (AT) resources and services at **at3center.net**, or explore the Family Caregiver Alliance's detailed guide to AT at: **www.caregiver.org/resource/assistive-technology/**



Sleep

Many people living with dementia experience problems with sleep, as the condition may cause changes in the brain affecting the body's internal clock which can impact day-to-day life and lead to changes in behavior. Problems can include difficulty understanding whether it's day or night, sleeping during the day, struggling to fall asleep at night, waking frequently during the night, or becoming inactive or needing less sleep. Some people may experience sundowning in the evening, which may cause confusion, disorientation, agitation, and anxiety.

Solutions to help

Talk to a doctor to help identify whether underlying conditions or medications are contributing to sleep problems. Create a sleep-friendly bedroom, which is quiet, dark, and at a comfortable temperature. Use nightlights to help find the bathroom at night, and put away daytime clothes to try to avoid confusion as to the time of day.

Encourage exercise, try to have exposure to natural daylight, and avoid sleeping during the day. Limit stimulants such as caffeine, alcohol, and screentime, and try to develop a relaxing routine before bed, such as playing soothing music, encouraging a warm bath, or drinking herbal tea.



How To Support a Person Living With Dementia

Caring for someone with dementia poses many challenges for families and caregivers. You may experience a variety of emotions including anger, grief, or shock, and you may be overwhelmed at times. However, the more information and support you have, the better you can navigate the road ahead.

Person-centered care

Every person with dementia is unique and their journey with dementia will be a very personal one. This means that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to planning for their care needs or activities for purpose or pleasure. It is important to provide care which is person-centered, whereby the care is appropriate, meaningful, and unique to each individual. The care should focus on what someone can do, not what they can't do, helping the person to feel valued and promoting their self-esteem.

When a person with dementia feels safe, secure, and valued, they are able to maintain their independence for longer and engage in their environment more effectively. Building a relationship between you and the person with dementia is essential to providing quality person-centered care.

People with dementia primarily experience problems with memory and thinking. They find it difficult to retain new information and they rely on past experiences to make sense of the present. By learning about and understanding the life journey of a person with dementia – that is knowing his/her stories, routines, and likes and dislikes – you can create a unique approach that will help you provide quality personalized care. This person-centred approach will also assist you to better manage any issues and generally improve their quality of life.

Ways of Providing Person-Centered Care

The three most common communication strategies are: reality orientation, validation therapy and reminiscence therapy.

Reality orientation

The aim of reality orientation is to gently bring someone who is disorientated or confused back from their world to their present reality by gently guiding them to an awareness of who they are, where they are, and the present time and date. This therapy works best for people with **early stages** dementia who recognize the concept of time and date. A tool to assist with Reality Orientation is a reality board. This is usually a whiteboard hung where it can be easily seen. Each day, the whiteboard is used to record important information including the date, the day of the week, the weather, and key activities for the day or week such as visitors or appointments. Every time the person with dementia becomes disorientated or confused, the caregiver can redirect them by using the information on the whiteboard to re-orientate them to the present.

Validation therapy

Validation therapy enters into the reality of the person. This way, empathy is developed, building trust and a sense of security with the person with dementia. Validation therapy is implemented by acknowledging the person's view of reality, and encouraging the validation by really listening and asking questions.

Acknowledging and validating the reality of a person with dementia can assist in preventing behavioral symptoms of dementia and allow them to enjoy revisiting a time or place where they were happy and content. Gradually you can reorient or distract them back to their current time and place.



Reminiscence therapy

Reminiscence therapy is widely accepted as being a beneficial communication therapy for people with dementia. By capturing the life journey of someone with dementia, you will be able to build a deeper one-on-one relationship with them. Reminiscence is enjoyable for most people and can create many positive emotional experiences for all involved. We all reminisce from time to time, and for someone with dementia, this can be a therapeutic event, as they struggle with remembering more recent events.

Talking with people with dementia about their lives can create a positive emotional experience, reduce stress, and provide a better quality of life. There are three techniques for gathering information. Ask questions, observe surroundings, and talk with family and friends. Reminiscence sessions should be easy going and light. Music, photos, and objects can help enhance memory gathering.

As you gather information about a person's life journey, organize it into a journal. This can be a binder, notebook, or scrapbook.

Be sure to organize and separate the material into several categories, such as childhood, young adult, marriage and family, career, etc.

This makes it easier to add information.

Reminiscing is about giving the person with dementia a sense of value, importance, belonging, power, and peace. It can take place at any time in a number of ways.

Visually: Looking through family photo albums, looking at objects that have meaning, for example, discussing a favorite item of clothing, or the history of an ornament or trinket, or a favorite painting.

Music: Listening to familiar tunes from the radio or CDs, and discussing the memories that the music triggers or singing to the music.

Smell or taste: Smelling favorite flowers or foods or using smell kits, or different foods as memory triggers for discussion.

Tactile: Touching objects and feeling textures which are familiar or relate to past activities and interests, or actively involving them in activities such as painting, pottery, or planting/weeding in the garden.

Your Life, Your Way



Communicating Effectively

Effective communication is where a thought or idea is passed correctly from one person to another, and they acknowledge its meaning. Losing the ability to communicate can be frustrating for people with dementia, their families, and caregivers. As the disease progresses, the ability to communicate may gradually reduce. They may find it difficult to express themselves and to understand what others are saying. Use a combination of verbal and non-verbal methods to effectively communicate with someone with dementia.

Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication is an important tool to help you listen to and communicate more effectively with people with dementia. As much as 93% of meaning can be derived from our body language and tone/pitch of voice.

People with dementia may lose the ability to effectively communicate their thoughts verbally and may use their behavior and other emotions to communicate.

When communicating with someone with dementia it is important to remember that all behavior is a form of communication.

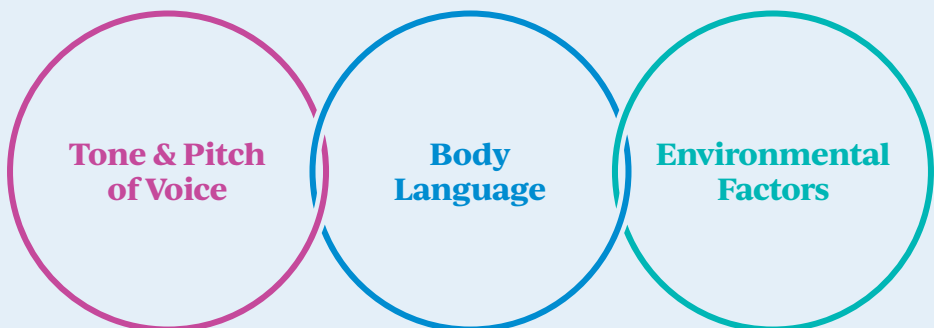
We all use non-verbal communication and body language to convey messages. People with dementia will read and react to your body language.

Consider approaching a discussion using the SOLER acronym (Egan, 1975):

- S** – sit or stand **squarely** to the person
- O** – maintain an **open posture** at all times
- L** – **lean** slightly towards the person
- E** – Maintain **eye contact** without staring (and being culturally sensitive)
- R** – **Relax**, this will help the other person to relax too

In addition, consider the following non-verbal ways that support communication with someone living with dementia:

- Be aware of your **body language** and attitude. For example, agitated movements or a tense facial expression may cause upset or distress, and can make subsequent communication more difficult.
- To gain a person's attention, **limit distractions** and noise, and maintain eye contact with them. Always try to speak to them at their eye level so they can see your expression clearly.
- Listen with your ears, eyes, and heart. Always strive to listen for the meaning and feelings that underlie the words.



Verbal-communication

When talking to someone with dementia, the following tips can help you communicate more effectively:

- Provide **simple choices**. Ask one question at a time – yes or no questions work best. Visual cues and prompts are a good way to increase understanding.
- Use **short, simple sentences** and break tasks into steps. Answer questions calmly and in a reassuring manner.
- **Avoid using slang** and talk to the person as an individual and not as a child.
- **Speak clearly and slowly**, with warmth and positivity.
- If you are unsure of the word the person is trying to say, **avoid guessing** as this can increase confusion. Allow time for the person to form the sentence.
- **Never argue or raise your voice**. Arguing or shouting will only increase levels of frustration and agitation.

As dementia progresses, a person's reality often becomes one of the past, and they may retreat back in time. Trying to reorient a person with an altered reality can cause distress and trigger behavioral symptoms of dementia.

Alternative communication approaches will help you to build trust and provide support. You may already use these therapies without realizing that you are, or when they can be most effective.

The key to providing quality care for someone with dementia is the relationship between the person and their caregiver. When implementing communication therapies, it is crucial to know and understand the personality and life story of the person with dementia, as this will make communication strategies more effective.





Understanding Behavioral Symptoms

Caring for a person with dementia can be challenging and requires patience and flexibility. One of the most distressing aspects of caring for someone with dementia, can be the changes in behavior that can sometimes occur. It is important to note that physical illness, pain, or discomfort of any kind can trigger a change in behavior and this may not be easily identified if the person with dementia cannot identify the discomfort or communicate it to you.

Always discuss any changes in behavior with a doctor, who will be able to check for illness or pain and provide treatment.

You may encounter behaviors that are different or even odd, and this can be particularly upsetting when someone is behaving in a way that is completely out of character. Try to remember that the behavior is not deliberate and may be a result of changes taking place in the brain.

It is also important to remember that all behavior is a form of communication, particularly for people with dementia, as they find it difficult to verbally express their needs, wants, and feelings, and may express such things through their behavior.

A change in behavior may also be a result of changes in their environment, health, or even a change in medication.

Simple activities, such as taking a shower, may become too difficult as the ability to recall the steps required during the showering process may be lost. As a direct result of the changes taking place in the brain, a person with dementia may react in a catastrophic way to some situations, or present a range of different behavioral symptoms of dementia. This behavior could include vocal outbursts or actions such as hallucinations, paranoia, or even violence. Every person with dementia is unique and will experience dementia in their own way, and this may not involve any behavioral symptoms.

The more common changes in behavior presented by people with dementia can include:

- Apathy and/or depression
- Refusal
- Repetition
- Sexually inappropriate behavior
- Wandering
- Aggression
- False accusations

Coping with changes in a person's behavior can be upsetting for family and caregivers. It is important that you understand a range of techniques that you can use to overcome the challenges that the behavior may present. You may even need to use several techniques at once. The key is to remember that the behavior is out of the person's control and though they may not appear to be, they are in need of reassurance and empathy.

Aggressive behavior is usually an expression of anger, fear, or frustration. Try not to take this personally, and remain calm at all times, however hard it becomes.

If you become angry or impatient, they will sense this, and their behavior may be exacerbated, escalating the situation.

Techniques to manage changes in behavior

- **Giving simple choices** helps a person feel in control.

People experiencing dementia are often confused and may feel they have no control in their lives and use behavior as a means of trying to regain control. If a person becomes angry, offering simple choices may calm them down and allow them to feel more in control. You can assist them by breaking down a task into simple steps or simple choices, and guide them through a task which may have overwhelmed them such as getting dressed or taking a shower.

- **Distraction** is a technique where you change the focus of the person away from whatever is distressing them to something that is more positive. You can distract them by talking about a different subject or engaging them in an activity that they enjoy. Some examples of this may include offering them something to eat or drink, watching TV, or asking them to tell you the history or meaning behind a photograph or painting. Don't underestimate the part you play in understanding their behavior and finding ways to help them overcome their frustration or agitation to help build their self-esteem. By focusing on them, you will find that you are able to support them and provide interest in their day.

Remember, help is available for people with dementia and their caregivers through the services listed at the end of this booklet.

- **Stimulating activities** for people living with dementia

Creating activities that both engage and stimulate someone with dementia can be challenging. Any activity you plan needs to be meaningful and appropriate to them. Meaningful activities are important to create a sense of purpose and accomplishment and reaffirm a person's individual strengths and skills. The key is to be flexible and creative. Engaging someone with dementia in activities that they enjoy means that they are more likely to participate. Even if they only have a short attention span, you can repeat the activities at a later time.

Everyday tasks can turn into meaningful activities when you engage someone with dementia. For example, hanging up or folding laundry, sweeping up leaves, weeding the garden or peeling potatoes while you are preparing a meal, are purposeful activities and can help someone feel worthwhile and engaged in daily life. Accomplishing simple activities may seem inconsequential to some, but can be a satisfying accomplishment for someone with dementia.

Engaging activities for someone living with dementia could include:

- Doing **activities they enjoy**, e.g., walking, gardening, knitting, reading, or watching sports.
- **Reminiscing over old photographs** or encouraging them to recall a story from their past. They don't have to remember the precise details, just let them enjoy talking about whatever they remember. Newspapers or archive video footage can also be used.
- Creating a **scrapbook of their life** or garden scrapbook from magazines.
- Planting and **caring for a boxed mini-garden** – try to find plants or seeds with sensory appeal and try to encourage smell, touch, and visual stimulation.
- **Creating an activity box** with dementia-specific coloring books or watercolor cards, reminiscence cards, famous face cards, or tactile items that are personal to them. This could also include travel memorabilia or items that represent their favorite hobby or their occupation/profession.
- Helping them **cook their favorite meal** or sharing food that helps them reminisce about previous times or their heritage.

The demands of caring for someone with dementia should not be underestimated, however, it can be rewarding and comforting to know that you are providing them with a safe and familiar environment. Over time you will face new challenges and have to adapt your care to meet their changing needs. While at times you may feel alone and isolated, it is important that you are aware and make contact with organizations and support networks. These can assist you and make the journey easier for both you and the person with dementia.

For information and support on responding to behavioral changes in someone living with dementia, contact the **Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline** at **800-272-3900** or online at **www.alz.org/help-support/resources/helpline**. Trained specialists are available at any hour to provide guidance, local resources, and crisis support.

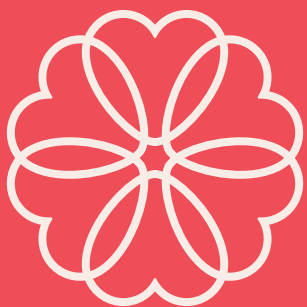
The **UCSF Memory and Aging Center** also offers extensive information about common behavioral changes in dementia and strategies for caregivers: **memory.ucsf.edu/caregiving-support/behavior-personality-changes**.

Need More Help

United States

- **Alzheimer's Association** is the leading national organization supporting people living with dementia, their families, and caregivers. Their free 24/7 Helpline provides information, local resources, crisis assistance, and emotional support — including guidance on younger-onset Alzheimer's and responding to behavioral changes. Call **800-272-3900** or visit **alz.org**.
- **Dementia Friendly America** works to make communities more informed, safe, and welcoming for people living with dementia and their care partners. Visit **dfamerica.org** to find a dementia-friendly community near you or learn how to get involved.
- **Family Caregiver Alliance** provides information, support, and local resources for family caregivers, including respite care options and caregiver coaching. Visit **caregiver.org**.
- **Eldercare Locator** is a free public service connecting caregivers and older adults to local support services across the US. Call **1-800-677-1116** or visit **eldercare.acl.gov**.
- For information and support on responding to behavioral changes in someone living with dementia, contact the **Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline** at **800-272-3900** or online at **www.alz.org/help-support/resources/helpline**. Trained specialists are available at any hour to provide guidance, local resources, and crisis support.
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A wonderful, professional, empathetic organization. The care and attention given to my mother is beyond appreciated. All of the staff are attentive and thoughtful and I am beyond blessed with my mom's well-being. Cannot recommend more highly.

– **Kathryn, daughter of a Dovidia client**



Together, We Create Care That Centers Around You

Dovida recognizes that your uniqueness is key to providing the highest quality of care. With you at the center of everything we do, we help you live the life you want in the comfort of your own home, for as long as possible.

Together with you, your family, and multidisciplinary team, we create a Circle of Care that centers around you. Because we don't just want to improve your day — we want to empower you to live your life, your way.

We provide a range of services including companionship, domestic assistance, personal care, meal preparation, medication reminders, and transport to appointments, shopping, and social outings. Care is available from two hours to 24 hours a day and includes dementia care and palliative care.



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