



MEMORY CARE™
HOME SOLUTIONS

Strategies

For Daily Life

For more information please call:

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TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

General Guidelines

- Patience is the key when helping someone with memory loss.
- If you see yourself getting frustrated, step away for a few minutes to gather yourself, and then re-approach.
- Avoid arguing, but offer praise and positive reinforcement.
- You often can't change the behavior of the person with dementia, but you *CAN* change the **task**, the **environment**, and your **approach**.
- Don't discard anything you try, remember it for another time and try it again.
- Be creative in what and how you say things.
- People with dementia benefit from a consistent, structured daily routine - with sleep, medication and meal times at roughly the same time every day.
- Most importantly, **take time for yourself!**

Communication

- Use **1 step instructions**, a calm and friendly voice, and keep it simple.
- Be patient and wait for a response – don't rush.
- Watch for non-verbal cues.
- Use statements instead of questions. Example: **"It is time for this delicious lunch,"** (*instead of*, "Are you hungry...what would you like?") or **"Here are your morning medications from the pill planner,"** (*instead of* "Have you taken your meds today?").
- Reduce/avoid choices - processing information can be difficult.
- Do not argue, but try re-directing or changing the topic of conversation.
- It is not usually helpful to convince a person with dementia of the 'truth' or 'reality' of a situation. He/she may not be able to grasp or remember the 'truth'. The best approach is to agree (even if you don't really agree), acknowledge his/her feelings, and then re-direct.

Repetitive Speech

- This can be frustrating for caregivers, but it's best to answer and move on, no matter how many times she/he asks the same thing.
- You can gently say that "I think you told me this recently..."
- Distraction is a good tool to use if your loved one becomes focused on one a topic or question.
 - Ask your loved one to help you with chores
 - Give your loved one a specific job to do
 - Bring up another conversation topic that your loved one enjoys

Behaviors/Agitation

- Feel free to shift the blame (to the doctor or anyone who is not there!) –or- use a therapeutic ‘lie’ if needed to de-escalate an argument.
- Paranoia is a normal symptom of dementia and may be a coping mechanism for people. People with memory loss sometimes accuse family members of taking items that they have just misplaced. While it may hurt your feelings, try not to take this personally! Share the accusations with your other family members so you’re all aware. Comfort your loved one and assure her/him that you’ll find a solution. Then, give the person time to forget the accusation.
- Door alarms can alert caregivers that a person is attempting to exit or wander from the home.
- If the person is seeing or hearing things/people that aren’t real, provide comfort and reassurance rather than acting surprised or alarmed. Then, report this symptom to the doctor.

Sun-downing and Time Awareness

- ‘Sundowning’ refers to periods of increased confusion and agitation as the sun goes down -- and sometimes through the night.
- Discourage daytime napping.
- Do not schedule appointments, challenging tasks, or special visitors during the afternoon or early evenings if sundowning is a problem.
- Avoid arguing and communicate in a positive and reassuring tone.
- It is common for people with dementia to lose track of time, especially when they are spending much of their time in the house. Having a consistent schedule will help with this.
- Keep the lights on in the afternoon and early evening.
- Regular exposure to sunlight can help regulate sleep/wake cycles.
- Regular activity during the day, such as exercise or attending adult day care, promotes better sleep at night.
- Depending on the severity of dementia, a designated **message center** can be helpful.
 - Post a large calendar and the daily schedule in a central location, like the kitchen. Cross off each day, and direct your loved one to this message center.

Financial Exploitation

- People with memory loss are prime targets for financial exploitation because they lack the judgment to make good decisions about **how** to spend money and **who** to trust.
- Consider providing a weekly ‘allowance’ that your loved one can spend however he/she chooses. Also consider requiring two signatures to cash checks or withdraw funds.
- Keep a separate account for paying bills. Use online bill paying or pre-pay bills if this is possible.
- If mail solicitation is a problem (sweepstakes and charity mailings), consider having the mail forwarded to a caregiver’s house.
- Discuss this topic with an elder law attorney and/or financial advisor for more detailed recommendations.

Activity Engagement

- Suggest ideas that make your loved one feel needed and useful. Your loved one still has a need to fill the role of parent/spouse/friend. Can your loved one help you fold laundry, prepare a meal, assist with a craft, etc.?
- Familiar, repetitive activities are often the best activities to try and engage a person with memory loss.
- Remember that the end result is NOT important. The goal is to stay engaged in any aspect or smaller step of an activity.
- With dementia, people lose the ability to **initiate** or **begin** daily activities, but can often complete a task once provided with help to get started. Provide simple cues and reminders to start activities.

Activity Examples

- **Exercise is good.** Encourage your loved one to exercise to best of their ability.
 - Go outside for a short walk, if possible.
 - If your loved one is in a wheelchair, or has limited mobility, do exercises that create arm movement or change position.
 - Any type of exercise is beneficial for a person both physically and mentally.
- **Focus on your loved one's past**, history, and happy life moments. Engaging them in conversation is easier if they know the topic.
 - What happened 50 years ago is probably easier to retrieve than what happened yesterday.
 - Reminiscing is a great family activity. If your loved one has old pictures or blankets/quilts stored away, bring them out. This will allow your loved one to stay engaged, and family members can learn history about their parents or grandparents.
- **Music:** If your loved one enjoyed music in the past, chances are they still enjoy listening to music.
 - When your loved one becomes agitated, try playing the type of music they enjoyed in the past (classical, gospel, jazz, etc.). This could help redirect negative feelings.
 - For those who are able, dancing is a great form of exercise and entertainment.
 - Soothing, background music may help your loved one during difficult times, such as sundowning.

Medications

- A weekly pill planner is a great way to reduce the risk of medication error, and allow for greater caregiver supervision of medications.
- If swallowing becomes difficult, some pills can be crushed/mixed with food. Many meds are also available in liquid form. **Ask your pharmacist.**
- Secure all medications in a locked cabinet or box to prevent rummaging and accidental overdose.
- There are also automatic pill dispensing devices, for people who may forget daily doses.

Hydration/nutrition

- Share a meal, including a drink, with each visit. Ask other friends and caregivers to do the same.
- Monitor your loved one's weight.
- Seniors can often take advantage of home-delivered meals or meals at senior centers, at no charge.
- People with dementia frequently forget to eat, skip meals, or eat too frequently. They may not perceive their body's feelings of hunger or fullness.
- Check the cabinets and fridge to monitor that food being brought into the home is actually being eaten.
- Encourage good fluid intake by always having a cool drink within reach of the person. Try flavored water, juice, popsicles, jello or any non-caffeinated drink to avoid dehydration.
- Keep healthy, convenient snacks within reach and on the counter, but secure other food in a locked cabinet to prevent over-eating.

Bladder Control/Incontinence

- Follow a **timed-toileting schedule**, by directing your loved one to use the bathroom every 2 hours during the day (even if he/she does not feel the urge to go).
- This will help maintain control of the bladder, prevent accidents, and lower the risk of urinary tract infections.
- Watch for signs of urinary tract infection (UTI) – such as an increase in confusion (more than usual), weakness, dizziness, balance problems, frequent urination, low-grade fever, or an odor to the urine. The most common symptoms of UTI in older adults are **weakness and fatigue with a change in mental status.**
- Good hydration, good hygiene, and regular trips to the bathroom can help prevent UTIs.
- Drinking cranberry juice can also lower the risk of UTI.
- There are special, extra-absorbent incontinence products that hold more liquid and prevent leaks. These products are good for overnight use.
- Use waterproof pads and covers to save linens from incontinence accidents.

Shower/Bathing/Personal Care

- If it seems that your loved one is avoiding the shower, try a different technique.
 - Maybe they prefer sponge bathing; if so try a sponge bath to reduce anxiety.
 - Your loved one may be fearful of falling in the tub. Provide assistance and use safety equipment to create a safe space.
 - Try adjusting the time of day for showers. Perhaps the person was always a morning/evening bather?
- Make the bath/shower an enjoyable experience.
 - Provide as much **privacy** as possible. Keep a towel or robe on when possible.
 - Soft, calming music playing in the background may reduce anxiety.
 - Try scented shampoo, body wash or candles to create a pampering/spa-like experience.
 - If you have access to a dryer, warm a towel in the dryer while the person is taking a shower. A warm towel may improve your loved one's comfort.
- Provide gentle cues and reminders.
 - For example, you can write "shower day" on the calendar once or twice/week. Then, the caregiver can use verbal cues and encouragement such as, "I see it's shower day today I'll get your water started. Let's go to the bathroom!"
- Your loved one does not have to take a shower/bath every day.
 - If you cannot get your loved one to shower one day, it is ok to try again the next day.

HOME SAFETY

General Home Safety Suggestions

- Have night lights in the home. Good lighting and clear pathways can prevent falls
- Keep important phone numbers posted by phones, including 911, cell numbers.
- Remove all throw rugs. If you do need a throw rug, make sure it has a no-slip backing.

Kitchen Safety

- Make sure all spoiled or expired foods are thrown out. Caregivers can check the fridge and pantry during visits.
- Observe the microwave, pots and pans to look for any signs that something has been burned.
- Provide healthy convenience foods that can be eaten without cooking.
- Add a smoke detector in the kitchen. Consider adding a smoke detector that is linked to an emergency alert system so that it will automatically call the fire department and a caregiver.
- Disable, remove or unplug appliances that may be used unsafely. For example, stove knobs can be removed to discourage cooking and decrease fire risk.
- Remove or secure hazardous items or chemicals, including knives, cleaning supplies, medications.
- Discount stores carry a wide supply of cabinet locks, including magnetic locks which are not visible on the outside of a cabinet. Cabinet locks can prevent rummaging.

Bathroom

- Add a non-skid bath mat to shower area.
- Set water temperature to 120 or less to prevent accidental scalding.
- Keep night-lights in all bathrooms.
- Remove medications and dangerous chemicals from medicine cabinets.
- Install grab bars in the tub/shower.
- Use of a hand-held shower and shower chair (or tub bench) allows a person to remain seated throughout a shower.
- Bedside commodes can be used over the toilet for added height and safety rails and can be placed near the bedside at night.

Bedroom

- Keep a flashlight by the bed in case of a power outage.
- Maintain a clear and lighted pathway from bedroom to bathroom, for safety with use of toilet at night.
- Keep a phone in the bedroom.