

## Practical tips for carers and families living with people with dementia

These are some practical ideas that could help you and your loved one. This list is not exhaustive and some of the suggestions may not be suitable or practical for you to do.

You can find many more tips and much more detail in the section 'Other resources that can help'. Many of the problems described here will not be an issue for you and even if they are, they may not be permanent.

Always consult your doctor if you are not sure why something is happening. Pain, infections, depression, and side effects from medicines are common causes of unsettled behaviour in people living with dementia.

### How to create a relaxing environment

- Put away things that are not often used and are unlikely to be looked for by the person with dementia.
- De-clutter your house and remove any trip hazards like rugs or old slippers.
- Try to keep out on the surface only things that you need every day.
- You can label cupboards or replace their doors with see through panels so that the contents can be seen.
- Have more light in the house. People with dementia get confused and mistake what they are looking at if the light is poor. Increase the wattage all the light bulbs.
- Use movement sensors that automatically light up the toilet area when someone gets out of bed.
- Consider a gentle night light.
- Keep the noise down.
- People with dementia don't always recognise their own face in the mirror. Roller blinds on mirrors can help.
- Consider aromatherapy and multisensory therapy that includes light, sounds and smells.

### Hints for bedtime

- Use a regular bedtime routine. Put away daytime things and replace them with night time things so when the person wakes up in the middle of the night they are reminded that it is night time and they should be in bed asleep.
- Consider a motion detector that triggers an alarm under your pillow when the person with dementia has got out of bed. This can allow you to get off to sleep without worrying.
- Try and arrange the bed room so that the head of the bed is in a position where the person with dementia can see the toilet.
- If sleep is a problem avoid drinks with lots of caffeine in.

### Activities and exercise

- Use activities and exercise to burn up excess energy, improve sleep and keep life interesting.
- Reminisce with the person with dementia to produce a life story book. Collect stories and talk about interesting things that the person remembers. If you end up making a book, include some photographs. This scrapbook can be a comfort for the person if they're agitated or upset. It can also be a topic of conversation of visitors.
- Make the most of opportunities for people with dementia to take part in groups like Memory Cafes that involve people who may be having similar experiences.

## Ways to manage difficult behaviour

There is always a reason for the difficult behaviour – when seen from the person's point of view. A person with dementia may misinterpret something and see it as frightening and threatening. For example, not recognising their husband who is might be trying to undress them for a bath, or not recognising themselves in a mirror. Shouting and fending off the 'stranger' could be an appropriate response.

The person with dementia may also lose many years of memories, so that grief first felt decades ago might be felt again as if it has just occurred. Also, sometimes people with dementia just get very frustrated with not being able to do something they want to do and this can make them very cross.

- If they are frightened by a hallucination or an illusion, just comfort them - to them it is very real.
- Don't confront behaviour or feel you have to correct the person if they are seeing things that don't seem to be there or saying things that are not true. There is rarely any point in arguing and sometimes it is okay to simply guide the conversation onto something else.
- Leave the room if the person is getting angry and aggressive if safe to do so.
- Always think of ways of distracting the person who is upset or agitated. It is much better than confrontation. Put on the TV, play some music, encourage singing and dancing.
- Encourage physical affection. People with dementia can often respond well to hugs and cuddles, even if they might have been embarrassed by showing affection when they were younger. Make the most of any available pets. Cats and dogs are great at receiving affection over and over again without embarrassment.
- A good long walk can help with poor sleep, agitation, aggression and a tendency to wander. Don't confront them - get them appropriately dressed and take them out until things have calmed down.
- Consider using an identity bracelet and buying a small GPS device in case the person gets lost. Have a recent photo easily available.

## Other resources that can help

10 Helpful Hints for Carers: Practical Solutions for Carers Living with People with Dementia *by June Andrews, Professor Allan House*

10 Helpful Hints for Dementia Design at Home: Practical Design Solutions for Carers Living at Home with a Person Who Has Dementia *by June Andrews and Colm Cunningham*

The dementia guide. Living well after diagnosis. <http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents.php?categoryID=200455>

Carers UK 0207 378 4999 [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers 0844 800 4361 [www.carers.org](http://www.carers.org)

Independent Age 0800 319 6789 [www.independentage.org](http://www.independentage.org)

The Relatives and Residents Association [www.relres.org](http://www.relres.org)