

DEMENTIA: CAREGIVER BASICS

WHAT IS DEMENTIA?

Dementia is a broad term used to group multiple brain disorders that lead difficulty in thinking as well as memory problems. The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's dementia which generally is first noticed when memory problems arise. Dementia is associated with older age, but, although uncommon, it can affect individuals of all ages.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEMENTIA

Symptoms may begin mild and slowly worsen including:

- [Confusion](#) – May have trouble remembering the year or where they are. May get lost in familiar places.
- [Forgetfulness](#) – Long term memory may remain better than short term. May forget where they placed items around the home.
- [Concentration Issues](#) – Inability to focus on tasks or think processes through. Multitasking becomes difficult. May begin to be less organized or lose motivation to complete a task. May have new issues with familiar tasks, i.e., balancing a checkbook or paying bills.
- [Poor Judgment](#) – May have decreased awareness into deficits. Many underestimate the deficits and create explanations for their behaviors or forgetfulness.
- [Communication Troubles](#) – May begin experiencing issues with speech and writing. Issues may arise with remembering names and faces of others.



HOW TO HELP

Dementia can affect everyone differently, but there are some things that can be done to allow functioning at the highest level. In all cases, safety is the priority.

- The living situation should be evaluated for safety, especially if living independently. You can change the environment to make it safer by doing little things like:
 - removing clutter, especially in walkways
 - Ensuring adequate lighting, add night lights to dark areas
 - Remove rugs when possible or tack them down to reduce trip hazards
 - Use child proof locks on cabinets with dangerous items (fire hazards, medicines, sharp objects) as well as on the stovetop when necessary
- If unable to live alone, other arrangements may be necessary like living with help, assisted living facilities, or skilled nursing facilities.



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HOW TO HELP (CONTINUED)

- If an individual with dementia is still driving, this is a good time to talk with the doctor to discuss if driving is still safe and when it should be stopped.
- There may come a time when your loved one is unable to make decisions. Looking into an advance directive to decide upon an alternate individual, called the power of attorney, to make decisions on behalf of your loved one when they can no longer make these decisions is important. This individual should talk with the power of attorney about what they would want done in different situations i.e., if they want a breathing machine should they be unable to breathe on their own power. These conversations should happen as early as possible when the individual can still make their own decisions. Talk to Honor Hospice staff about creating an advance directive.
- Continue to allow your loved one to make as many decisions as possible to promote independence and allow them to participate in activities they still enjoy doing. When giving options, try to stick to 2 options, allowing independence without being overwhelming.
- Create a routine to help your loved one follow a schedule to make daily activities easier to remember.
- Speak in a calm manner, use simple words, small sentences, and only give directions one step at a time.
- Purchase clothing options that are easy to put on and take off.

Remember that caring for an individual with dementia can be difficult in all regards. Make sure to take time to take care of yourself and ask for help when you need it.

WHEN TO CONTACT THE HONOR HOSPICE TEAM

- Call any time you see a rapid progression in symptoms or sudden behavioral changes.
- When your loved one is acting in an unsafe manner, posing a risk of harm to themselves or others.
- You have any questions regarding your loved one or questions in how to assist them.
- You need assistance in caring for your loved one.

References

Wolk, D. A., & Dickerson, B. D. (2021). Clinical features and diagnosis of Alzheimer disease. In S. T. DeKosky (Ed.), *UpToDate*. Retrieved November 7, 2021, from https://www.uptodate.com/contents/clinical-features-and-diagnosis-of-alzheimer-disease?search=alzheimer%20dementia&source=search_result&selectedTitle=1~150&usage_type=default&display_rank=1#H12



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