

Caring for someone with Dementia

Introduction

Staying as physically and mentally fit and healthy as possible is very important for anyone with Dementia. The better they are feeling, the better they will be able to cope with the daily challenges of living with the condition. Below are some tips and suggestions when caring for someone with Dementia. Please remember, it is still important to treat them as an individual, ask them what they want and always treat them with respect.

Mental health

To help people with Dementia to stay as engaged and mentally active for as long as possible, they still need:

- To be respected and valued as an individual
- To have their needs and wants taken into consideration
- As little stress as possible
- Routines and regular mental stimulation
- A range of meaningful activities that they enjoy and can do alone and with others
- Stimulation to help them remain alert
- Interaction and relationships with others.

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Exercise

Being as physically active as possible will benefit someone who has Dementia. Regular movement and exercise: extends their independence, encourages better circulation, reduces stiffness and muscle wastage, improves sleep, helps relaxation and increase calmness and improves the management of other illnesses and conditions.

Try and encourage a short walk at least every day. You can make this interesting and engaging by walking in a garden or park and talking about the wildlife and flowers etc. Try and find a place to walk which the person with Dementia is interested in and where they feel comfortable / happy.

Even if your loved one cannot walk, try to encourage them to keep active whenever and wherever possible. For example, there are a number of chair-based exercises that can be done. If you or someone can do the exercises with them, then they are more likely to want to do them and keeping fit can still be fun.

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Eating healthily

If a person with Dementia eats well they are less likely to get ill. If the body does not get enough of the 'good stuff', it can also add to confusion and make their condition worse. So try to:

- Avoid too many sugary and fatty foods
- Make sure they are eating enough – but not too much so that they put on too much weight
- Sit and eat with them so they don't forget to eat and it can become a more pleasurable / social time for them
- If they are having difficulty, offer finger foods instead
- Avoid dehydration (as this can make people more confused) older people need around 7 glasses (1.6 litres) every day.

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Keep warm

Hypothermia can lead to serious problems so avoid getting too cold for long periods of time by:

- Keeping the rooms that they are in warm
- Draft proof and / or add insulation where possible (government grants may be available for this)
- Encourage wearing layered clothing - even indoors
- Encourage regular exercise and movement
- Encourage the wearing of hats and coats outdoors.

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Other things to consider about staying healthy

- Sleep well
- If someone with dementia wants to continue smoking, make it as safe as possible. If they want to quit, seek help from their GP
- Balance any risk with the persons independence and right to choose. Try to keep alcohol as a social activity. If drinking becomes a problem consider offering lower alcohol options and/or ask for help from their GP
- Avoid constipation
- Poor hearing can add to confusion – if you think it is becoming a problem request a hearing test from your GP
- Poor eyesight can also add to confusion. If they wear glasses, remind them to put them on. Have a few pairs of glasses around the house. If you have worries, book an appointment with their eye specialist.

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Other things to consider about staying healthy - continued

- Look after feet well. Poor foot health can lead to decreased mobility, exercise and activity
- Encourage regular GP, Dentist and eye appointments. Accompany them to ensure that they understand any instructions and help them manage the appointment.

More Information

There are lots of great tips and ideas about health and wellbeing available on the Age UK and Alzheimer's UK websites: www.ageuk.org or www.alzheimers.org.uk or call the Dementia UK helpline on 0800 888 6678 - www.dementiauk.org