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Coping with Dementia



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## What You Need to Know

### This Guide

This little booklet is meant to provide help and practical tips, not medical advice. It is not meant to replace diagnosis and care from your physician. Because medicine and lifestyle adjustments are critical to your loved one’s treatment plan, be sure to stay in contact with your doctor, and let them monitor changes in your senior’s condition.

### What Is Dementia?

Dementia itself is not a disease. It is instead a set of symptoms that may be caused by a variety of underlying causes, such as Alzheimer’s, mini-strokes, Lewy Body disease, head trauma, Huntington’s disease, and other diseases.

### Is Dementia the Same for Everyone?

No, it is not. Changes in the mind may occur and the disease may manifest itself quite differently in different people. It is impossible to predict what change will occur next, but we are able to say with certainty that changes will occur.

### Dementia and the Family Structure

When an individual develops dementia, the whole family is affected. Memory loss can be heartbreaking, and care becomes hard for one person to manage.

## Different Causes of Dementia

### Alzheimer’s Disease

The origins of Alzheimer’s Disease are unknown. It is the most common cause of dementia. As the disease progresses, it damages and kills brain cells. Although the risk increases with age, Alzheimer’s is not a natural part of the aging process.

### Vascular Dementia

This type of dementia is the result of tiny strokes that occur within the brain, often without the person being aware of them. The repeated occurrence of these little strokes leads to significant destruction of brain tissue.

### Lewy Body Disease

This disease occurs when patients develop abnormal deposits of protein in the brain. These deposits, called “Lewy Bodies,” when combined with chemicals in the brain, cause changes and problems with behavior, mood, movement, and thinking.

### Other Diseases

Head Trauma can lead to dementia in some cases. It may also be a symptom of Huntington’s Disease, Wernicke-Korsakoff Syndrome, and Pick’s Disease. It can also be caused by inadequate oxygen supply, head injury, or stroke.

## When You Get the Diagnosis

Receiving a diagnosis of dementia may be heartbreaking, but keep in mind that the symptoms affect different people in different ways.

### Dementia is not a Personality Disorder

Although it can change your loved one’s personality profoundly, it is distinctly different from personality disorder, which is a mental illness.

### Dementia is not a Mental Illness

Many people make the mistake of assuming that because dementia affects the brain that it is a mental illness. Although the symptoms may be similar, the causes are completely different.

### Dementia is a Moving Target

Realize that dementia is a moving target, requiring constant evaluation and adjustments, as necessary.

With dementia, what you compensate for today may be completely different from what you need to make an adjustment for tomorrow.

That’s one of the most frustrating things for a caregiver to deal with. Once you finally find solutions that work, they may no longer be relevant… as your loved one may change day to day.

## Communication

Dementia can destroy communication. What would have been an effortless conversation in the past, becomes exhausting.

### Verbal Frustration May Lead to Physical Problems

As frustrating as it may be for you as a caregiver, watch for signs of frustration in your loved one. Often, as they become increasingly frustrated with their inability to make sense of things, they may become aggressive, and lash out in fear and anger.

### Tips When Communicating with Your Loved One

* Maintain good eye contact and a friendly appearance.
* Speak slowly and clearly in your natural speaking voice. Do not use baby talk.
* Watch for Body Language Cues you are giving and receiving.
* Be patient… Trying to rush the conversation or showing your impatience will frustrate both of you.
* As it was before dementia, you won’t win every conversation. Decide what are non-negotiables, and what you can let go. It will be easier for both of you to keep it simple.

## Behavior Issues

### Irritability

The most concerning behavior changes that come with dementia is irritability because it can become aggressive and can result in your loved one becoming physically violent, throwing things, or yelling.

### Indifference

When your loved one becomes withdrawn, it may be their attempt to be quiet and figure things out or advancing brain tissue disease may be the culprit. Move within their comfort zone when trying to engage with them.

When BehaviorIssues Become a Problem

* Are they hungry or thirsty?
* Could they be feeling unwell today?
* Have they been receiving their medicine when needed?
* Do they need to use the bathroom?

### Hallucinations and Delusions

These are common occurrences in dementia, when your loved one can no longer distinguish between what is real and is happening now, with what occurred in the past and is not a reality. Do not argue, as that is counterproductive. Just let them know that you hear them.

## Sundowner’s Syndrome

The most peculiar and frustrating part of dementia… Sundowner’s Syndrome occurs when behavioral problems appear or increase in severity at the end of the day.

They will seem tired and sad. They may express this by wandering around the house, arguing, deciding to leave, and not cooperating with meals and general care routines.

### Tips for Sundowner’s Syndrome

* Do not plan complex activities for the evening.
* Engage in quiet activities at this time of day.
* Keep additional lights turned on.
* If they want to wander around the house, let them do it, if hallways and walkways are clear of trip hazards.
* Ask your doctor for help… they make be able to prescribe medication that help ease these symptoms.
* Try to persuade them to rock in a rocking chair, sometimes this satisfies them with soothing motion.
* Make sure the neighbors are aware that your senior may decide to take a solitary walk. Ask them to call you right away if they see him walking alone.

## Help for Caregivers

This is some of the toughest work you will ever do. It is critical that you take care of yourself, or you will end up in your own health crisis.

### Get Professional Help

When you are caring for a loved one, you may feel that it’s a private matter, or a personal responsibility that you must handle by yourself. Here are some things to consider:

* Are you educated in the area of dementia?
* Are you experienced as a dementia care provider?
* Are you able to be objective about the disease, without letting emotional responses get in the way?

If your answer to these questions is “no,” then you should get help from a professional.

Neither one of you benefits from going it alone.

To increase your knowledge base about dementia, visit alzheimersassociation.com to learn more.

Lean On Dee is a valuable resource that can help you get through this. Call or email us, and we will be happy to talk with you.

## How Lean on Dee Can Help?

### Companion Services

We create customized care plans and manage them closely. Our experienced team and friendly companions ensure consistent, high-quality care. With flexible schedules, our caregivers are available whenever and wherever needed, enabling clients to maintain their regular activities.

### ​Nurse Assisted Doctor Visits

Sometimes it seems like doctors are speaking another language. Our Nurse will assist with preparation for doctor’s appointment, communication with the doctor on behalf of the family and the client, comprehensive post-visit summary, and follow-up per physician’s orders.​

### Home Safety Assessment

We will assess the living environment and make recommendations for hardware and fixtures that may need to be installed or repaired to help to support your loved one in the home and making referrals to our list of trusted partners for services that can assist in fixing or installing them. Our goal is to reduce falls and avoidable hospitalizations.