

## 5 *Fundamentals* of Caring for Someone with Dementia

Dementia care is daunting, but may not be as challenging as you would expect. Whether you care for a parent or senior loved one with Alzheimer's disease or another type of dementia, or are a senior care professional approaching your role with some knowledge — the right attitude is crucial to success.

Educating yourself about dementia and maintaining a positive but realistic attitude allows you to maintain an element of control as a caregiver. It can take the sting out of surprising challenges you encounter and also improve the care that you provide.

Here are some important facts to consider when approaching your role caring for someone with dementia:

### 1. **Accept support. (Button 1)**

Whether you are caregiving for someone in your family, or whether you provide care professionally, never be afraid to ask for help. Many family caregivers find support groups immensely helpful. Support groups allow caregivers to vent in a group setting with people who understand what one another is going through. It also allows caregivers to hear what is working for other caregivers and learn about local Alzheimer's and dementia resources. Similarly, professional caregivers shouldn't be reluctant to ask a colleague for support when facing an exceptional challenge or difficult time. Caregiving for someone with dementia is not easy and there will certainly be moments when professional caregivers need a hand or someone to talk to.

### 2. **Actively empathize. (Button 2)**

Care starts with compassion and empathy. This holds true in all human relationships but may be especially salient for dementia caregivers. For example, people with dementia are prone to becoming confused about their whereabouts and even the time period in which they are living. For instance, imagine how you felt and would want to be treated if you suddenly found yourself disoriented in an unfamiliar place, not even sure of the year or even your own identity.

### 3. **Be a realistic caregiver. (Button 3)**

Be realistic about what constitutes success during the progression of the disease. Success is helping to assure that the person you are caring for is as comfortable, happy and safe as possible. Most experienced dementia caregivers will tell you that the person they care for has good days and bad days. Try your best to foster the good days and even the good moments for

the person with dementia, don't try to force them. Also, be realistic about the course of the disease. Remember that most types of dementia, including Alzheimer's, are irreversible and progressive. Dementia will tend to get worse over time and there is no known cure. (A prominent exception is dementia induced by medications, which can be reversed when medications are withdrawn.)

#### **4. Dementia is more than memory loss. (Button 4)**

Memory loss is a classic dementia symptom. But some types of dementia, particularly frontotemporal dementia and Pick's disease, manifest themselves as personality changes rather than memory loss. The symptoms depend on the areas of the brain that are affected by the disease. Even when memory loss is the most apparent symptom, the person with dementia is experiencing a neurological decline that can lead to a host of other issues. A patient may develop difficult behaviors and moods. For example, a prim and proper grandmother may begin to curse like a sailor. Or a formally trusting gentleman may come to believe that his family is plotting against him or experience other delusions and hallucinations. In the latest stages of most types of dementia, patients become unable to attend to activities of daily living (such as dressing and toileting) independently. They may become non-communicative, unable to recognize loved ones and even unable to move about.

#### **5. Plan for the future. (Button 5)**

The only inevitable is change when you are caring for someone with dementia. Never get too used to the status quo. That means that family caregivers should prepare for a time when their loved one may need professional memory care in a residential setting. This involves both financial planning and identifying the most appropriate care options in your area. Professional caregivers and memory care providers also need to plan ahead. They should be mindful to continually reassess the care needs and health status of clients and residents with dementia. Remember that care needs will inevitably increase and plan ahead for any transitions that the resident may require in the future, such as a move to a skilled nursing provider or hospice care.

Source: <https://www.alzheimers.net/caring-for-someone-with-dementia/>