



Caring for a Parent with Dementia at Home

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If your parent or other loved one has been diagnosed with dementia, you may be considering caring for them at home. This isn't an easy decision. There are a lot of factors to consider, including the relationship you have with your loved one, the level of care you feel you can give him or her, the environment in which your loved one would live, your schedule and availability, whether or not you can get help and support from others, and what day-to-day life caring for someone with dementia looks like.

Benefits to Caregiving at Home

While there are a lot of factors to take into consideration, there are benefits to home caregiving. Those with dementia do well with familiar environments, so your loved one may find your home or their own home very comforting. Even if he or she sometimes experiences confusion about his or her whereabouts, a place that's familiar, even on a subconscious level, can ease this anxiety. This familiarity gives dementia patients a sense of stability.

At the beginning of the disease, home caregiving is useful in monitoring symptoms.

Dementia typically begins with only mild memory loss and patients are usually able to continue living on their own for a while. However, if you and your loved one are happy with the arrangement, living together can help you to become aware of worsening symptoms before they become a danger to your loved one.

Another benefit of home caregiving is the ability to monitor your loved one's diet. As dementia progresses, overwhelmed by the sheer volume of choices, many patients struggle with grocery shopping and eating balanced meals, or forget to eat altogether.

Of course, the primary benefit of home caregiving is that you get to be with your loved one!

Day-to-Day Life as a Caregiver

Being able to see your parent or other loved one with dementia on a daily basis is wonderful, but it's not always feasible. Day-to-day life as a caregiver can be very difficult. Before you take this responsibility on, make sure that you know all the facts, are prepared, and, perhaps most importantly, have a support network in place.

A day caring for a dementia patient, particularly as the disease progresses, requires a lot of structure, but also some flexibility.

In order to thrive, dementia patients need a schedule that is more or less set. Your daily tasks will likely include creating a schedule and ensuring that your loved one sticks to it, as well as monitoring his or her behavior, eating, self-care and medication usage. As dementia progresses, it's also likely that you will help with activities of daily living (ADLs) like bathing, dressing, oral hygiene, and more.

When dementia progresses from mild to moderate, it will be dangerous to leave your loved one alone for even short periods of time, so someone will need to be with him or her at all times, including throughout the night.

Creating a Plan and Sticking to It

When you decide to take care of your loved one with dementia, you will need to create a daily care plan. This plan will ensure that your loved one feels comfortable, and also that you don't waste valuable time trying to figure out what to do with the day.

When organizing your day, don't forget to include plenty of time for the necessities of daily living--hygiene, dressing, mealtimes, etc.--as well as recreational activities that you both will enjoy. Structured activities that your loved one enjoys can improve mood and reduce agitation. Planning activities for a loved one with dementia doesn't always go smoothly right away, but if your loved one doesn't respond well to an activity, you can learn and adjust for next time.

Before you start planning out your days together, make sure you take into consideration your loved one's likes, dislikes, what time of day he or she functions the best, and what his or her day looked like before. It's important to plan and implement regular times for waking up and going to bed, as many dementia patients suffer from sleep issues and sundowning, a state of confusion often experienced in the late afternoon and into the night. Sundowning can lead to anxiety, aggression, and wandering.

While a structured routine is important for dementia patients, leave some flexibility for spontaneous activities, such as receiving visits from friends or family members.

Possible Daily Activities

- Meals
- Personal hygiene
- Dressing
- Chores and errands
- Creative activities, such as arts, crafts or even listening to music
- Reading
- Going for a walk
- spiritual/religious activities
- puzzles/games
- Social activities
- Spontaneous activities

It's helpful to break down these daily activities into different blocks, such as morning, afternoon and night, but don't worry about filling every single moment of the day with something. Sometimes taking some quiet time will do you both good.

Getting Help

You may need some help in caring for your loved one, even if it's just every now and then. If you have no friends or family who are able to look after your loved one, you can hire in-home health aides, who can offer companionship or basic assistance to your loved one. These health aides can be hired as full-time help, part-time help, or just as needed, to give yourself an occasional respite.

Support is Crucial

Caring for someone with dementia is a huge undertaking and getting the support you need is crucial for success. If you don't have a support network of friends and family, it's ok. You can create your own support network. There are many support groups for caretakers, both in-person and online. Take a look at online communities such as Facebook groups or Reddit.com, or see what support groups meet up in your city.

Prepare for the Future

The most important thing is to be flexible. Your loved one's needs will change, and yours may as well. If you're no longer able to offer the same level of care, you should be prepared to take the next step.

If you are ready for long-term care, [schedule an appointment](#) with Sundara Senior Living to see if we are the right care community for your family.

Home Safety Basics

Creating a safe environment for your loved one is also high on your to-do list when considering home caretaking. As dementia worsens, patients are more likely to cause harm to themselves, but basic home safety preparations can prevent accidents.

Here is a starting point for home safety tips for dementia, but it may not be all-inclusive:

Bedroom:

- ☐ Make sure that your loved one can get in and out of bed safely. He or she may require a step stool or safety mat.
- ☐ Use a night light, or at least have a lamp that is easily accessible from bed.
- ☐ Ensure there is a clear path out of the room.

Bathroom:

- ☐ Ensure that your loved one can get in and out of the bathtub safely: safety rails, nonskid bathtub grips, and/or a shower stool can help.
- ☐ Install a safety frame or raised seat near the toilet.
- ☐ Put medications, cleaning products and bathroom appliances away in a locked cabinet

Kitchen:

- ☐ Lock up cleaning products and other chemicals
- ☐ Put child-proof latches on cabinets and drawers that have scissors, knives, matches or lighters, or other dangerous items
- ☐ Install safety knobs on the stove
- ☐ Disconnect the garbage disposal
- ☐ Remove fake fruits or anything similar. Your loved one may mistake them for real food.

General:

- ☐ Make sure that doorways and pathways are clear of clutter and well-lit.
- ☐ Ensure that outside areas are well-lit.
- ☐ Make sure that stairs or ramps have handrails.
- ☐ Put smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors on each floor, and test them regularly.
- ☐ Be wary of fire hazards such as space heaters and electric blankets.
- ☐ Clear clutter regularly. Cluttered spaces can cause anxiety and confusion in those with dementia.
