

Patient information from BMJ

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Caring for someone with dementia

People with Alzheimer's disease or another type of dementia gradually lose the ability to look after themselves. Their personality also changes.

It can be heartbreaking to watch a person close to you change in this way. There will also probably be times when it seems as if they're being deliberately difficult. But it's important to remember that your relative or loved one can't help their behaviour.

You might find it helpful to try to relate to what the person is feeling, rather than what they're saying. For example, if someone thinks their things are being stolen, it might be because they are anxious about forgetting where they've put things.

You could try putting labels on things, or making sure things are always put away in the same place.

If your loved one or relative has **delusions or hallucinations**, there's no point in trying to persuade them that the things they think are happening aren't real (although you shouldn't actively agree that the things are happening either).

It's better to gently distract or reassure them than argue. Simple things, like going for a drive or listening to music, may help.

You also need to make sure you have some time to yourself. It might help to have a few days away every so often. You might consider respite care, where your loved one spends a few days in a care facility.

You might feel guilty about doing this. But looking after your own needs will help you take better care of your loved one, and help you from becoming stressed or depressed.

There will probably be a time when you need to think about getting regular help. This could be extra help at home, or in a residential care home or a nursing home.

- Help at home can include help with washing, dressing, shopping, and cooking, as well as practical aids to make it easier for someone with dementia to live safely at home.
- Residential care homes offer help with personal care, such as washing, dressing, and getting to the toilet.

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- Nursing homes have a trained nurse on duty at all times, and offer more intensive nursing care, which may be needed if a person is very confused or is incontinent.

These can be difficult decisions to make and you may need a lot of help to decide what's best. It's wise to think about these things sooner rather than later, so that you'll have plenty of time to look around and make the right choice.

There are organisations and charities that provide advice and support for people with dementia and their carers. In the UK, for example, you can contact the Alzheimer's Society (alzheimers.org.uk) and Alzheimer Scotland (alzscot.org).

Your doctor might be able to help you find support in your area, or you can search online.

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