



**DementiaUK**

Helping families face dementia

# Looking after yourself when you care for someone with dementia



### Looking after yourself

Looking after someone with dementia can be a 24-hour a day job, and one that may be both physically and mentally demanding. It can be difficult to prioritise your own needs, as well as make the most of the time you spend with the person with dementia, and maintain good relationships with the rest of your friends and family. However, it is vital to look after

yourself and to try and take part in activities you enjoy. If you are not well and do not have enough support or time to recharge your batteries, you will not be able to continue.

It is important to try and realise that you are not just a family member, you are also a ‘carer’. This entitles you to particular help from health and social services, as well as financial breaks and benefits.





## How can you look after yourself?

### Take care of your health and wellbeing

It can be useful to think of looking after yourself as a carer as a bit like giving first aid, or putting the oxygen mask on during a flight emergency: look after yourself first, so that you have the strength to look after those around you.

It is important not to neglect your own physical or mental health when caring for someone with dementia, even though it might seem as though you have no time for yourself. Niggling pain, or feelings of depression or that

you cannot cope, might seem like the least of your worries, but you should visit your GP to get these issues identified and treated.

- Continue with your regular dentist, optician and hearing checks, as well as those of the person you are caring for
- Keep yourself physically active: make time to go for a walk, play sports if you enjoy them, swim, do yoga, join local classes
- Keep your mind active: read books or the newspaper, do puzzles and crosswords
- Maintain a healthy diet and ensure regular mealtimes

### **Enjoy time with the person you care for**

As dementia progresses, it can become more difficult to separate the person from the condition, and if you are the main carer, the care you give might start to take over completely from the relationship that you had with them before.

Because dementia is a progressive condition, it does mean that the person will change over time. It is normal for the people around them to feel a range of emotions, such as grief, anger and guilt, all of which can also influence your relationship. But there are things you can do to remain connected to or reconnect with the person, so that your relationship, although different, still brings you both some enjoyment. You might need to be creative: if you both previously liked hiking, or taking holidays together, consider what it was about those activities that appealed to you. Can you recreate any of that enjoyment by going for walks or sitting outside in the park or the garden?

Any other activity you can do together which creates a sense of connection can be worthwhile.

Explore what the person living with dementia can still do, rather than what they cannot. You could try:

- Listening to music together
- Watching a favourite film or musical
- Going for a walk
- Looking at pictures of places you have travelled to
- Going through photos of you together
- Physical touch, such as a hand massage

### **Looking after your other relationships**

Try to make sure you have a life outside of your caring responsibilities and that you get support from those around you. This can seem difficult and perhaps unimportant when there is so much to do for the person with dementia. But staying in contact with your friends and family gives you the opportunity to talk to other people about what you are going through and also to get some vital help, support and respite from the caring role. You could:





- Let other family members know what your caring responsibilities involve. Very often, people outside the home – and even inside it – don't realise just how much you're doing. Ask them to help. Perhaps they can come and sit with the person once a week so you can have a break and do something you enjoy
  - If possible, divide up the various jobs you have amongst the family, and if it's useful, create a rota
  - Schedule a phone or video call with a friend for a time you know the person with dementia will be asleep, or at a day centre etc. Even a short call could help you recharge your batteries
  - Access peer support from other people who are caring for someone living with dementia; this can be at a carers' group or dementia café
  - Speak with your GP or social services about what local respite services there are, so that you can arrange some time to yourself
- There might come a time when the person you care for will need to move into a residential care home,



go into hospital, or will no longer need your full time care. When your caring responsibilities change or stop, it is really important that you still have things to do and people to speak to.

If you have any questions about looking after yourself when you're looking after someone with dementia, or anything else about the condition, call the Admiral Nurse Dementia Helpline on **0800 888 6678**.

## Sources of support

### **Dementia UK resource on Life story work**

[www.dementiauk.org/life-story](http://www.dementiauk.org/life-story)

### **Dementia UK leaflet on Emotional impact of a diagnosis of dementia**

[www.dementiauk.org/emotional-impact](http://www.dementiauk.org/emotional-impact)

### **Dementia UK leaflet on Dealing with stigma**

[www.dementiauk.org/dealing-with-stigma](http://www.dementiauk.org/dealing-with-stigma)

### **Dementia UK leaflet on Staying healthy**

[www.dementiauk.org/staying-healthy](http://www.dementiauk.org/staying-healthy)

## **Our Admiral Nurses can help**

If you have any questions or concerns about dementia, you can call the dementia specialist Admiral Nurses on our Helpline for free.

Call **0800 888 6678** or email [helpline@dementiauk.org](mailto:helpline@dementiauk.org)

Opening hours:

Monday-Friday, 9am-9pm

Saturday-Sunday, 9am-5pm

The information in this booklet is written and reviewed by dementia specialist Admiral Nurses.

We are always looking to improve our resources, to provide the most relevant support for families living with dementia. If you have feedback about any of our leaflets, please email [feedback@dementiauk.org](mailto:feedback@dementiauk.org)

We receive no government funding and rely on voluntary donations, including gifts in Wills.

For more information on how to support Dementia UK, please visit [www.dementiauk.org/donate](http://www.dementiauk.org/donate) or call **0300 365 5500**.

**Publication date: Sept 2020**

**Review date: Sept 2022**

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If you're caring for someone with dementia or if you have any other concerns or questions, call or email our Admiral Nurses for specialist support and advice.

Call **0800 888 6678** or email [helpline@dementiauk.org](mailto:helpline@dementiauk.org)

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