

*Here is a collection of tips'n'tricks from individuals currently caring for someone living with dementia. Most important tip:*

Concentrate on where you are now, plan your next step, and accept that sometimes that step will not work out. Tomorrow isn't here yet, and you survived yesterday.

*Tips are organised into varying areas of support.*

1. Communication
2. Dementia Friendly Homes
3. Managing Challenging Scenarios
4. Activities of Daily Living
5. Leisure Activities
6. General Tips
7. Self-Care

## **Communication**

- Be mindful of approaching from the front so as not to startle the person.
- Talk slowly and at eye level.
- Remove background noise and distractions.
- Don't argue, contradict, or explain in detail, stepping into the persons reality.
- Keep things simple and stick to short specific statements.
- Don't remind the person of what they have forgotten.
- During times of increased anxiety or confusion, acknowledge their feelings, and change the topic or move to another area.
- Walk away when they say something that hurts - don't let them see that you are upset.
- Just phrasing things differently can produce a better response.
- Try asking questions that require a yes or no answer.
- Show as well as talk, as actions are easier to understand than words.
- Touching too roughly when communicating may cause increased stress.

## **Dementia Friendly Homes**

- Label drawers, cupboards, and doors and remove clutter.
- Remove loose mats that could become a tripping hazard.
- Regularly check the battery in your smoke detector.
- Check height of the bed to make it easy to get in and out of and use plain bed covers.
- Use plates and cutlery that are a different colour to the placemat or tablecloth.
- Install a toilet seat that's a different colour to its surroundings.
- Check that outside areas aren't uneven or slippery.
- Add orienting items like an easy-to-understand clock and calendar.

## Managing Challenging Scenarios

- Stay calm, and remember it's not the person, but dementia that is behind the behaviour.
- A gentle hand on my mum's hand works wonders when she is confused or upset.
- When changing clothes and showering, getting into the shower with the person, seems to get through the routine much quicker.
- The persons abilities can change from day to day, so take a few moments at the beginning of the conversation or task to assess how they are going.
- Regularly be on alert for changes in behaviour and body language that may indicate how they are feeling.
- Keep to a routine and distract the person or move to another area if they are anxious.
- Never rush the person or yourself as the person will pick up on it.

## Activities of Daily Living

- Ensure the person has the ability to carry out the task you are requesting them to do.
- Break task into small steps and explain what needs to be done in simple language and give the person time to carry out the task without rushing.
- Express appreciation when they have completed or even partially completed the task. (This is something I always forget to do)
- Learn to enjoy **doing** the task, rather than judging the end result.
- Dressing now requires assistance, so I select a choice of only 2 sets to choose from.
- Always check the temperature of the water in the shower before the person goes in.
- Avoid any clutter around whatever you are doing (e.g. extension cords)

## Leisure Activities

- I find the best activity for family, friends and the person living with dementia is reminiscing and digging out old photos.
- Once a week I take dad out for lunch which seems to reorientate him slightly.
- Buying takeaway coffee once or twice a week and sitting outside and chatting about the day and reminiscing works wonders to decrease anxiety and negative behaviours.
- Going out as a regular routine to familiar places works for us, and having an ice-cream always calms him.
- In fine weather walking along the jetty and chatting to a fisherman about how many fish they catch is always a highlight.
- When the person is making a choice, only offer a couple of choices e.g. if buying an ice-cream offer chocolate or vanilla, rather than the array of choices offered.
- Use what you know about the person, to suggest topics for conversation or activities.
- Focus on what the person can do and forget about what they can't do.

## *Reminiscence Discussions*

- Reminiscing feels safe for people living with dementia as they feel more in control when talking about the past. Be mindful that reminiscing is very different from encouraging the person to live in the past. *Tips to help your reminiscence:*
- Help keep the facts accurate by relating them to the past as opposed to the present.
- Discuss topics in a quiet, unhurried way using very clear language and expressions.
- Try to have something visible with any topic in discussion.

## *Suggested Themes*

- **Home:** Where was your first home? Did you move often? Why? Which was your favourite home?
- **School:** Where did you attend school? Did you like your teachers? Who was your favourite teacher? What was your favourite subject?
- **Pets:** Did you have pets? What were their names? How did you choose the name? Would you like to have a pet now?
- **Gifts:** Have you ever been given a gift that you have always valued? Have you ever received a gift that you did not like?
- **Names:** Do you recall the names of childhood friends? Is there a name you would have preferred to be called? Are there any names you dislike and why?
- **Pastimes or Sports:** What was your favourite activity? Did you ever go fishing, camping, beach holidays? Where did you go and how did you fill in the time?
- **Happy Days:** Do you remember a day that was happy or special for you? Describe it. What makes you happy now?
- **Books:** What was your favourite type of story? Do you still like looking at books or magazines? Were you required to read specific books at school?
- **Food:** Do you have a favourite food? What foods did you eat as a child? Have foods changed over the years?
- **Television:** Tell me about your first television. What were your favourite programs? Can you name any of the old TV shows?
- **Work:** What was your first job? Do you remember what you did with your first pay and how was it paid? What did family members do for a job?

## **General Tips**

- Don't do the task **for** the person, instead do the task **with** them.
- Try to get out of bed, shower and eat meals at the same time every day.
- Ask friends and family not to be offended if they are not remembered.
- Don't give alcohol or caffeine at night.
- Try not to make decisions when you are stressed.
- Think about your tone of voice, body language, and to smile even when the last thing you feel like doing is smiling.
- Ensure your emergency plan and contacts list are located somewhere where you can reach easily when under pressure.

## Self-Care

- Stop, breathe, smile, and if needed just leave and come back to it later.
- Listen to the person, acknowledge their feelings, and then respond.
- Practice what strategies you will use when stressed or under pressure.
- Don't take things personally.
- I use my time after X has gone to bed for some **me** time. Always a big cup of tea... and a movie of my choice. sometimes reading with my favourite music in the background. It gives me wind down time on my own. I've even been doing a bit of meditation.
- I went online and learnt "tapping" and have found it quite helpful for calming.
- Acknowledge that you need some assistance and don't be afraid to ask for it.
- Set realistic boundaries with what you can and can't do.
- Forgive yourself when you don't get the results you wanted.
- Take regular breaks, even a couple of minutes can make a difference.
- **Laugh, play and stop to smell the roses.**

***Communicate through the senses.*** Use the senses to maintain a connection.

- **Touch:** Hold the person's hand. Give a gentle massage to the hands or feet.
- **Smell:** The person may enjoy the smell of a favourite perfume, flower, or food, which may bring back happy memories.
- **Vision:** Videos scenes of nature with calming sounds can be relaxing.
- **Hearing:** Reading to the person can be comforting, with the tone and rhythm of your voice providing comfort. What you say is not as important as how you say it: speak gently and with friendliness. Music is a universal language that promotes wellbeing.
- **Tactile:** Engaging with different textures, particularly the gentle pressure of a hand or the soft texture of her favourite blanket works for us.
- **Simple "beach in a box":** plastic containers filled with sand, shells, and the recorded sound of waves has helped reduce boredom, and the sensation of sand slipping through her fingers proved particularly calming.
- **Food:** Offer different tastings of food.

XYZ became restless every afternoon about 5pm, and her husband remembered each day at that time she would start preparing a multi course meal for her family of 6. He started giving her access to a basket of serviettes and cutlery each afternoon at that time, and she began setting the table for 6 people rather than the current number of 2 people. He noted that she was humming through this time and that her appetite improved.