

# About you: Looking after yourself

**If you are living with dementia, this help sheet suggests ways to look after your health and wellbeing.**

Looking after yourself and keeping your mind and body active are important to live well with dementia and reduce the risk of needing additional care and supports.

There are many things you can do to continue to enjoy life and remain independent for as long as possible.

## Your health

Below are a few suggestions to look after your health:

- Have a regular general health check-up.
- Talk with your doctor about exercising regularly. You might stay active by walking, gardening or continuing with other activities you enjoy, even if you need to modify them.
- Make time for relaxation every day.
- Rest when you are tired.
- Eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water.
- Limit your alcohol intake. For some people, alcohol can make memory problems worse.
- Ensure you are taking medication as prescribed. A pill box (dosette box) can help organise your medication. The chemist can sort tablets into the dosette box for you regularly.

## Your feelings

It is normal to experience a range of emotions. Everyone has their own way of dealing with their feelings.

Sharing your feelings often helps to understand them. It may help to join a support group, or to talk with a trusted family member, a friend or counsellor.

You might also like to try:

- crying or laughing, which release feel-good chemicals in the body
- keeping a journal
- finding comfort in activities you enjoy such as music, aromatherapy, art, dance or gentle exercise
- being kind and patient with yourself.

## Memory loss

Memory loss is a common symptom. On some days your memory will be better than others and while this fluctuation is normal, it can be unsettling. Sometimes you may remember events from long ago quite clearly, while recent events may be harder to recall. You may have difficulty keeping track of time, people and places.

To help you manage memory loss, you might keep a diary or notebook and try to have it with you all the time. It could include:

- important contact numbers, including your own and ones you may need in an emergency
- your address and a map showing where you live
- names and photos of people you see regularly (you may note down their relationship to you, such as 'son' or 'friend')
- appointments
- a list of things to do
- a record of your daily activities to look back on
- thoughts or ideas you want to remember.

Around the home:

- Place a whiteboard or pin board in a prominent place, like the kitchen. You could use this to write important things to remember for the day or the week. You could also write important contact numbers in large print, including emergency numbers and where you live.
- Keep a special place for important items such as your phone, glasses, wallet and medications.

- Label cupboards and drawers with words or pictures describing the contents, such as dishes, knives and forks.
- Having a calendar to mark off days as a way of keeping track of the time.
- Consider safety in and around the home, introducing safety solutions early so that when they are needed, they are familiar and useful.

If family and friends are visiting, you could ask them to phone just before they come as an extra reminder.

## **Maintaining communication**

Communication is a crucial way of letting people know what you think, feel or need. It is also important for maintaining your relationships with family and friends.

As dementia progresses, it can become difficult to express yourself. It can also become difficult to understand what others say.

You may need to develop new ways of communicating with people. Family and friends will also need to develop new ways of communicating with you.

Helpful communication tips:

- Slow down and take more time to speak.
- Find a quiet place to talk where there is little distraction.
- Let people know when you are having difficulty speaking or understanding.
- Describe the person, place or thing if you cannot recall the name.
- Ask family and friends to prompt, remind or help you if you are struggling to find a word or repeating yourself.
- Give people feedback on how their communication style works for you.

## Walking safely

You may be at increased risk of becoming lost, whether your walk is part of your daily routine or something unplanned.

Walking is a healthy activity that should be part of your everyday life. There is no need to stop walking, even once you have been diagnosed with dementia. You may just need to make some small changes.

Below are some tips to enjoy walking safely:

- Try to take the same route each time.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- If you need assistance, explain to people that you have a condition that affects your memory.
- Carry some form of identification, including your name, address, phone number and the details of someone who is an emergency contact.
- Consider the use of a mobile phone to use maps for directions or sharing your location with someone if you need help.
- Consider wearing a personal alarm that has a built-in tracker, as well as the ability to make and receive emergency calls.

## Daily tasks

Your ability to carry out daily routines and activities might change over time, but it does not mean stopping doing what you enjoy.

You just might do things differently.

- Give yourself plenty of time and do things at your own pace.
- Break tasks into smaller steps and take one thing at a time.
- If something is too difficult, try taking a break for a while or ask for help with parts of the task.

## Planning for support

There are many ways to seek support to maintain your self-care and look after household tasks.

Some suggestions:

- Organise to have your groceries delivered or arrange home-delivered meals.
- Consider hiring a home maintenance service.
- Arrange for somebody to help with house cleaning, meals, transport and daily chores.
- Arrange for help paying bills. You can give a trusted person the legal authority to handle money matters. You can also speak with your bank or service provider about automatic payments.
- If dementia impacts your ability to drive, consider using public transport, taxis and community transport, as well as lifts from family and friends.

## Additional reading and resources

- Dementia Australia library service  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/library](https://dementia.org.au/library)
- Dementia Australia support  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/support](https://dementia.org.au/support)
- Dementia Australia education program  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/education](https://dementia.org.au/education)
- Dementia Australia help sheets  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/help-sheets](https://dementia.org.au/help-sheets)

### Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

**National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500**

**For language assistance: 131 450**

**Visit our website: [dementia.org.au](https://dementia.org.au)**