

About you...

Feelings and adjusting to change

If you have been diagnosed with dementia, this Help Sheet may be useful. It explains some of the feelings you might be experiencing, and some ways to adjust to the changes that dementia brings.

Experiencing changes related to memory loss or dementia may lead to a range of different emotions. Feelings of shock, sadness, frustration, embarrassment, anger and loss are all common when dealing with memory changes. Of course, feelings of happiness, pleasure and joy can also be experienced while living with dementia.

It is normal to experience a range of feelings, and there are ways to help find a balance between allowing yourself to experience the sadness and frustration and of finding ways of feeling happiness and pleasure.

Shock

When first receiving a diagnosis of dementia, you may feel shocked. "Why me?" and "What does this mean?" are common questions people ask themselves. With any major news it is usual to feel distressed for a time while adjusting to the new information and making sense of what it means. In time, these feelings usually diminish as you understand what dementia is, and find ways to adjust.

Alternatively, some people are relieved to have an explanation for the memory and other problems they have been noticing over time. They can move on with life knowing the reason for their symptoms and what they are now dealing with.

Anger

Some people feel angry about the changes they are now having to cope with. Anger about the illness, anger about memory loss, anger about having trouble with things they used to be able to do. It's natural to feel anger and resentment about these things at times.

Frustration

This is probably the most common feeling expressed by people living with dementia. Having trouble remembering, doing something you used to do, or searching for something you've misplaced can be extremely frustrating.

Loss and sadness

It is natural to feel sad or upset over the losses you may be experiencing. Loss of abilities, skills or independence can create enormous sadness and may at times feel overwhelming.

Sadness persisting for a long time without easing may indicate depression. It is important to talk to your doctor or a counsellor for ways of treating this. Sometimes medication can help in this situation.

Embarrassment

Forgetting a familiar face or not being able to find the right word to express yourself can be embarrassing. This may in turn make you feel angry or frustrated.

What to try

Emotional reactions are very normal because you are facing many challenges and adjustments. Everyone has their own way of dealing with their feelings. The important thing is to find ways that help cope with any difficult feelings.

Experiencing the feeling. Allow yourself to really feel what you are feeling, no matter what it is. Denying the feelings and hoping they will go away tends to intensify whatever feelings you are experiencing

Talking to a trusted family member or friend may help. Sharing feelings often helps to understand and reduce them. You might like to consider talking to a counsellor at Dementia Australia

Crying. Tears can be very therapeutic because they release 'feel good' chemicals in the body. Let them cleanse and relieve the sadness inside

Laughing. This also releases 'feel good' chemicals in the body, so finding any opportunity to laugh can be a big help

Keeping a journal. Some people find this very helpful. Writing down feelings or recording on an audio tape can help to clarify and understand them, and expressing them like this in a private place can help

Enjoying activities. Doing something you enjoy or gain pleasure from can be a big help if you are feeling down. Focus on the things you are still able to do, and enjoy them as much as you can

You might like to try using other ways to express your feelings. You may find music, aromatherapy, art, dance or gentle exercise makes you feel good. If you have the opportunity to try some of these activities, give it a go

A sense of spirituality may be gained from religious activities, meditation, appreciating art, enjoying a sunset, walking along the beach, or spending time with family. It is very important to keep enjoying anything that gives meaning to your life or a sense of pleasure

Let some things go. There may be times when you are struggling to remember a piece of information that seems to be vital. Is it worth the feelings of frustration and stress? Try letting it go and focusing on something else

Being kind and patient with yourself. You are experiencing changes that are not your fault, and are part of an illness. You may need more time to do or remember things, so try to be patient with yourself

FURTHER INFORMATION

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at dementia.org.au



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**