

Good care in a residential care home

This help sheet describes some important aspects of good care for people with dementia who are living in residential care homes.

Good care requires a flexible approach, providing each resident with the best possible care and support.

A good care environment should be as homelike as possible.

It's important to consider what is most important to the person living with dementia, to ensure they receive support and care that is specific to their individual needs.

If there are concerns about a need for improvement in a home, discuss these with management.

If you feel that the care home does not welcome your feedback, consider contacting:

- **Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission**
- **Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)**

Important aspects of good care

Consider what aspects of care are most important to the person with dementia. These may include:

- flexibility around meals
- unrestricted visiting hours
- privacy and space for the resident and their visitors to have time together.

Resident-centred care focuses on individualised care for each person, to ensure their physical, social, cultural and mental wellbeing.

What a good care environment involves:

- Staff are encouraged to adopt and implement a resident-centred approach to care.

- Staff are trained in dementia care and understand the impacts of dementia.
- Staff giving direct dementia care are backed by manager support and strong leadership.
- Providing residents with individual support to maintain their wellbeing.
- Staff encouraging residents to maintain their independence, preferences and chosen lifestyle as much as possible. For example, gardening activities in outdoor spaces that are easily and readily accessible, or participating in basic food preparation, such as making toast.

Specialist care for people affected by changes in behaviour or mood

Some care homes have separate areas to support people impacted by behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia. This separate area may be a dementia-specific unit, wing, or another space, to support the wellbeing needs of the person and the safety of all residents.

Good care includes seeking ways to minimise changes in behaviour and mood, such as:

- good dementia design, including safe areas
- individual activity programs that offer choice and appropriate levels of engagement
- a quiet area away from television and music
- engaging with family, friends or even pets, who the person connects with other aspects of their life.

Some care homes will consult with you and perhaps a specialist, who may suggest a medication review or further assessment. Any special care needs should be addressed in a care plan. You should be consulted and involved in developing strategies or actions to support the person's health and wellbeing.

Culturally appropriate care

Good care involves:

- seeking to know and understand the person's cultural background
- communicating in the person's preferred language
- providing a culturally inclusive environment.

Involving relatives and friends

Good dementia care involves relatives and friends as much as possible. The care home should:

- consult and actively involve you in care planning and review
- encourage your involvement in residents' meetings, committees and support groups.

Effective pain management

People living with dementia are often unable to tell someone when they are in pain. Pain may be shown through changes in behaviour, such as being restless, upset or aggressive. If there is a change in behaviour or mood, it is important to ensure this is not caused by pain.

Staff should have clinical skills in pain assessment and management, acknowledging and using the experience of families and carers to implement a range of appropriate pain management strategies.

Restraint practices

Chemical restraint, or other restrictive practices such as physical restraint or isolating a resident with severe behavioural changes can only be used by aged care providers under very strict conditions, and the circumstances must be reported as part of compliance requirements.

A restrictive practice must only be used as a last resort. Other options for managing changes in behaviours must be tried first.

If medications or chemical restraint are used:

- They should be used for the shortest period possible.
- The person themselves or their substitute decision-maker must give informed consent.
- Their use must be monitored and regularly reviewed.

Specialist supports

Good care for people living with dementia should include:

- access to specialist psychogeriatric assessment and advice to manage the symptoms of dementia

- advice of allied health professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, dieticians or psychologists to achieve the best quality of life for the person
- palliative care support during the terminal stage of dementia, working with the person's healthcare team to maintain the person's comfort, choices and quality of life.

Where to make complaints

- Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
Visit: agedcarequality.gov.au/making-complaint
Call: **1800 951 822**
- Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)
Visit: opan.org.au
Call: **1800 700 600**

Additional reading and resources

- Dementia Australia library service
Visit: dementia.org.au/library
- Dementia Australia support
Visit: dementia.org.au/support
- Dementia Australia education
Visit: dementia.org.au/education

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