

The *Overwhelmed* Caregiver's Guide to Dementia Care

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Someone you love has dementia. *Here's what to do now.*

Dementia – it's not just forgetfulness on steroids. It's a progressive brain condition that affects memory, reasoning, and eventually the basic skills required for daily living. And for caregivers? It can feel like stepping into a play where the script keeps changing. Each day brings new scenes and challenges, and you're learning your role as you go.

While no one wants to be in this situation, it can be comforting to know that thoughtful, compassionate care, using specific techniques, can make a huge difference in your loved one's quality of life.

It's also important to know you are not alone, and we can help – starting with this expert-driven, tips-packed, empathy-filled guide.



Self Care for the Caregiver: *Understanding Your Own Emotions*

CAREGIVER EMOTIONS

Caring for someone with Alzheimer’s or another form of dementia can bring a mix of emotions, from guilt and anger to sadness and acceptance. These feelings are natural and part of the process. Acknowledging them and seeking support can make the journey more manageable.



WHAT EXACTLY IS DEMENTIA?

Dementia is a term for a group of diseases that gradually destroy memory and cognitive abilities. Imagine your loved one's brain as a library with books slowly disappearing from the shelves, and the librarian is replacing them randomly with new ones.

There are 6 main types of dementia, with varying symptoms. Learn more about them here: (LINK)

This condition progresses over time, making it more challenging to carry out day-to-day tasks. Unfortunately, it's irreversible, but significant and promising research and advancements are being made. (LINK)

WHAT CAN RAISE YOUR RISK FOR DEMENTIA?

While we're all at some risk, some factors increase the likelihood of Alzheimer's, including:



AGE

After age 65, the risk doubles every five years.



FAMILY HISTORY AND GENETICS

If Alzheimer's runs in the family, especially in close relatives, your risk is higher.



HEAD INJURIES

Traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), especially those involving loss of consciousness, can increase your chances.



HEART HEALTH

Poor cardiovascular health can lead to dementia by reducing blood flow to the brain, causing strokes, and promoting inflammation and oxidative stress. Conditions like high blood pressure, heart disease, and atrial fibrillation increase the risk of vascular dementia and contribute to Alzheimer's.

TEN WARNING SIGNS OF DEMENTIA

There’s a difference between the forgetfulness that comes with normal aging and dementia. Forgetting someone’s name once in a while? Normal. Forgetting to turn off the stove? That’s when safety is becomes a concern.

Here are 10 common warning signs – check any and all that apply:

- ☐ 1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life – forgetting recently learned information, like where you parked the car.
- ☐ 2. Difficulty planning or solving problems – for example, managing bills becomes impossible.
- ☐ 3. Trouble completing familiar tasks – cooking the family’s favorite recipe is suddenly a mystery.
- ☐ 4. Confusion with time or place – getting lost on a familiar route is a common sign.
- ☐ 5. Challenges understanding visual images or spatial relationships – difficulty judging distance can affect things like driving
- ☐ 6. Problems with words – finding the right word becomes frustrating and conversations lose their flow.
- ☐ 7. Misplacing things and being unable to retrace steps to find them.
- ☐ 8. Poor judgment – like dressing for winter in July, or giving away large sums of money to scammers over the phone or online.
- ☐ 9. Withdrawal from work or social activities – losing interest in hobbies, sports, or social events that they once loved.
- ☐ 10. Changes in mood and personality – becoming easily upset, anxious, or depressed without explanation.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF IT'S DEMENTIA?

Diagnosing dementia isn't a quick visit. A doctor will need to rule out other potential causes of cognitive decline like vitamin deficiencies, depression, or medication interactions. After a detailed medical history and cognitive testing, they may order brain imaging or even a spinal tap.

1. Alzheimer's Disease
2. Vascular Dementia
3. Dementia with Lewy Bodies
4. Mixed Dementia
5. Frontotemporal Dementia
6. Young Onset Dementia
7. Korsakoff Syndrome

Learn more about the different types of dementia here: (LINK)

STAGES OF DEMENTIA

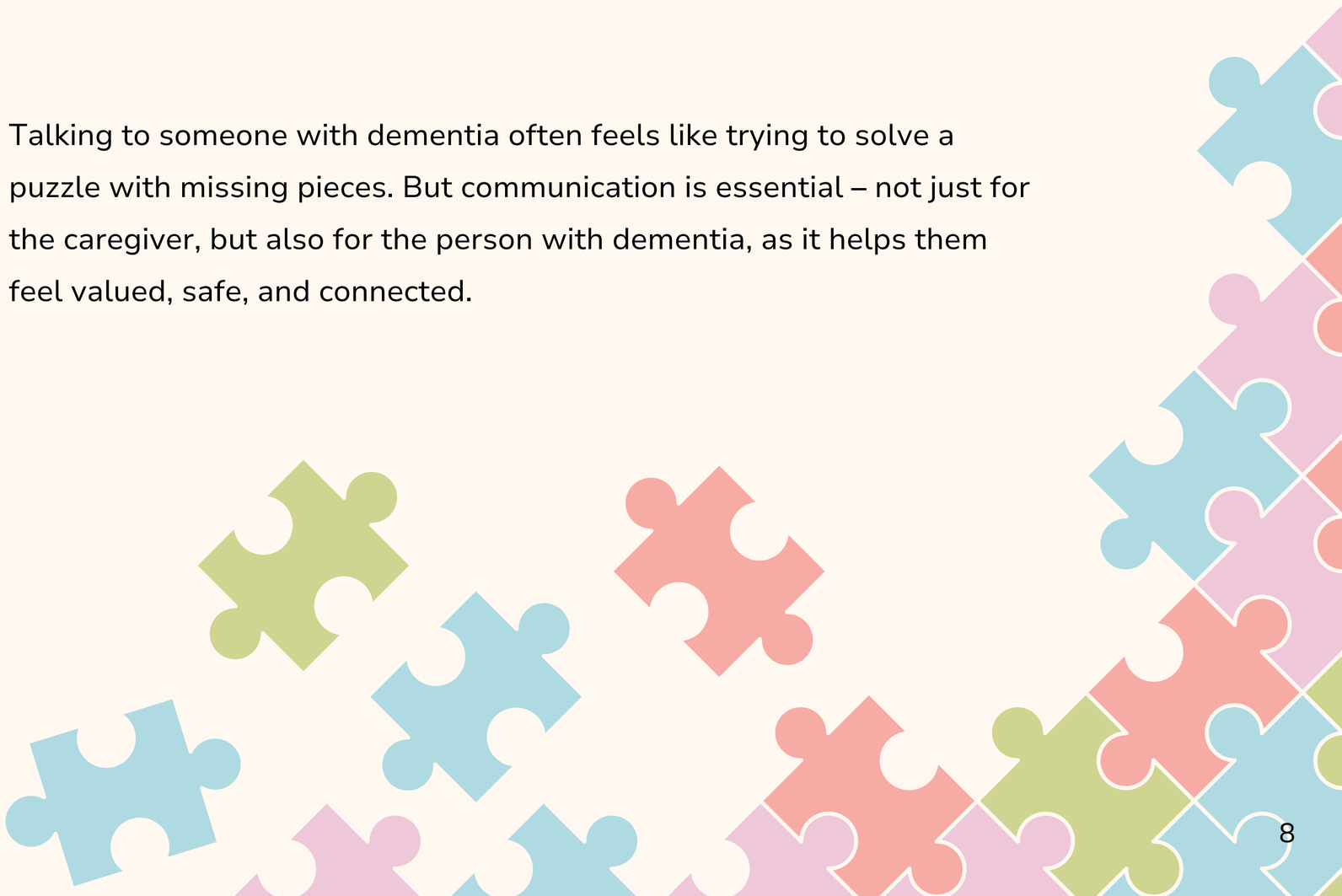
Dementia progresses in three main stages:

MILD (early-stage)
MODERATE (middle-stage)
SEVERE/LATE STAGE

Early on, you may notice minor memory lapses. In the middle stage, confusion grows, along with behavioral changes. By the late stage, your loved one may require round-the-clock care as they lose their ability to communicate and control movements.

Communicating with Your Loved One

Talking to someone with dementia often feels like trying to solve a puzzle with missing pieces. But communication is essential – not just for the caregiver, but also for the person with dementia, as it helps them feel valued, safe, and connected.



USING BODY LANGUAGE

It’s all about your tone, body language, and patience. Approach your loved one with a calm demeanor. Smile, make eye contact, and avoid sounding rushed. Even when words fail, your loved one will pick up on your emotional state. Their brain is struggling, so keep everything relaxed and simple.

ASKING QUESTIONS AND OFFERING HELP

Try to avoid open-ended questions. Instead of “What would you like to wear today?”, try offering two options: “Do you want to wear the blue shirt or the red one?” When giving directions, break them down into small, single steps. And if they can’t follow along, offer visual cues or hand gestures to clarify.

FINDING THE WORDS

When your loved one struggles to find words, don’t correct them or finish their sentences immediately. Give them time. If they still struggle, offer a word or two to help: “Oh, you mean your cousin, Anne, right?” Acknowledge their frustration and try to keep the mood light, even when communication feels difficult. “It can be hard to remember, but no worries. We can talk about it later.”

PROCESSING HARSH WORDS AND INSULTS

People with dementia often lash out when they’re scared or confused. If your loved one gets snappy or insults you, remember it’s not them talking – it’s the disease. Try not to take it personally, and instead, redirect the conversation to something pleasant. Sometimes a simple change of scenery, like going to another room or even a walk outside, can help reset their mood.

At Artis we use adaptive and empathetic language to foster connection, reduce anxiety, and support the dignity of individuals with dementia. Here are some examples to help you:

***"What time is my doctor's appointment?"* (repeatedly)**
Common Response: "You already asked me that."
Better Way: **"That's a great question—let me help with the answer."**

"I put my shoes in the fridge so I wouldn't lose them!"
Common Response: "No, that's not right."
Better Way: **"Hmm, let's look at this together and figure it out."**

***"I want to go see my husband, Richard?"* (when he has passed away)**
Common Response: "You know he passed away, right?"
Better Way: **"You must miss him so much—tell me about one of your favorite memories together."**

"Why didn't you tell me the appointment was at 2 PM?"
Common Response: "Remember, I told you this morning..."
Better Way: **"I know it's hard to keep track— how about I write it down next time to make it easier for us both?""**

"I don't want to eat now; I'm not hungry."
Common Response: "You have to eat now—it's lunchtime."
Better Way: **"Here's something I think you'll enjoy for lunch—let's try it together."**

"I don't know where my room is."
Common Response: "Don't you remember where your room is?"
Better Way: **"Let's walk to your room together—it's right over here."**

***"These shoes feel fine—I'm ready to go!"* (wearing mismatched shoes)**
Common Response: "You're wearing the wrong shoes."
Better Way: **"These shoes might be more comfortable—let me help you switch them."**

"I can't button my shirt—this is too hard!"
Common Response: "Why can't you just do this? It's easy."
Better Way: **"Let's take this one step at a time—I can help if you'd like."**

***"We went to the beach yesterday, remember?"* (when this didn't happen)**
Common Response: "No, that's not what happened."
Better Way: **"Did we? What was your favorite part?"**

***"Where's my purse? Did someone take my purse?"* (repeatedly)**
Common Response: "No one is stealing from you; you probably just misplaced it."
Better Way: **"Oh no, that must be frustrating. Let's look for it together—where do you think we should start?"**

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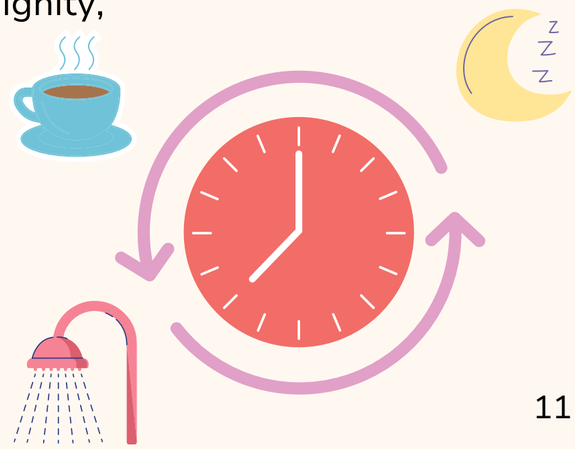
These responses demonstrate empathy, provide calm guidance to avoid frustration, and validate the person's feelings to help them feel heard and valued without emphasizing memory challenges.

Routine Rules: *The Secret to Better Dementia Care*

Routine is the unsung hero of caregiving.

For people who need dementia care, it provides **stability, reduces anxiety, and fosters security**. Predictable daily activities help minimize confusion, enabling individuals to feel more in control. Familiar routines support cognitive abilities, emotional well-being, and physical health by preserving skills, creating moments of joy, and ensuring consistent self-care, nutrition, and medication. They improve sleep patterns by regulating circadian rhythms.

For caregivers, routines **simplify planning and reduce stress** while offering opportunities for meaningful engagement. A well-structured routine enhances the quality of life for individuals with dementia, promoting comfort, dignity, and connection in a predictable and supportive environment.



WAYS WE CAN SUPPORT ROUTINE ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING



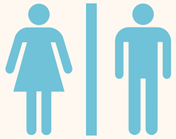
BATHING

Many people with dementia become resistant to bathing due to fear or confusion. To ease anxiety, maintain a routine so bathing happens at the same time every day. Prepare the bathroom ahead of time – ensure it's warm, well-lit, and that everything is ready. Give clear, step-by-step guidance, and use soothing tones. Summon the power of positivity – turn it into a relaxing, spa-like experience with soft music and calming scents.

GROOMING

Keep hair, nails, and skin clean to prevent infections, but let go of perfection. If they're resistant to brushing their teeth or shaving, focus on what's necessary for hygiene, and skip the rest. Electric razors are safer for shaving, and if they hate washing their hair, try a no-rinse shampoo.





USING THE BATHROOM

Incontinence can become an issue in the later stages. Make the bathroom accessible – keep it easy to find and well-lit. Offer regular reminders and check in frequently. For overnight care, consider protective undergarments to avoid accidents.

GETTING DRESSED

Simplicity is key. Lay out clothes in the order they should be worn, and offer just two outfit choices to avoid overwhelming them. Use adaptive clothing with Velcro or elastic waistbands to make the process easier for everyone.



WAYS WE CAN SUPPORT ROUTINE ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING

MEALTIME

People with dementia may forget to eat or refuse food. Small, frequent meals can be more manageable than large ones. If your loved one struggles with utensils, try switching to a spoon or offering bite-sized finger foods. Hydration is crucial – sometimes, people with dementia forget they're thirsty, so remind them often and keep a drink within arm's reach. Stick to a routine, "and keep mealtimes calm and distraction-free. Make it a social occasion – sit down and eat with them, even if they don't eat much.





SLEEPING

Sleep disturbances, like sundowning, are common. Create a soothing bedtime routine – dim lights, soft music, and quiet activities in the evening. If your loved one is restless at night, encourage short naps during the day but avoid long ones that could mess up their sleep schedule.

SHOPPING AND ACTIVITIES

Keep your loved one involved in activities that match their abilities – sorting laundry, stirring cookie batter, or gardening. It's not about being productive, it's about keeping them engaged and giving them a sense of purpose.





EXERCISING

Gentle, regular movement is great for both physical and mental health. Walking, chair exercises, or simple stretching can keep joints limber and prevent stiffness. Plus, it helps with sleep and mood regulation.

Understanding & Supporting Difficult Behaviors

Dementia can lead to a variety of new behaviors that can leave you scratching your head, wondering, “Where did this come from?”
It’s important to understand that many of these actions stem from confusion, fear, or frustration. Recognizing the root of these behaviors can help you manage them with more empathy.



THERAPEUTIC WAYS WE CAN HELP NAVIGATE CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS.

MEMORY LOSS

Memory loss is the hallmark symptom of dementia. When your loved one forgets where they are or even who you are, it can be distressing.

What to do: Instead of correcting them, try reorienting them gently. Use memory aids – like placing photos with names around the home.

SHADOWING OR CLINGING

Some people with dementia feel scared when left alone and may follow their caregiver everywhere.

What to do: Reassure them with your presence, but gently encourage independence by giving them tasks to do while you're nearby.

PACING

Pacing can be a way to relieve anxiety or excess energy.

What to do: Allow it in safe, secure open spaces, making sure their environment is free of hazards.

LATE AFTERNOON CONFUSION (SUNDOWNING)

As the sun sets, people with dementia may experience increased confusion, anxiety, and agitation.

What to do: Reduce triggers by minimizing noise, bright lights, and stressful activities late in the day. Establish a calming, pre-bedtime routine to help ease this transition.

LOSING & HIDING THINGS

Your loved one might hide objects or put them in strange places – like the TV remote in the freezer.

What to do: Rather than scolding them, help them look and use humor to defuse the situation. Designate specific spots for frequently lost items, and check there first.

How To Pay For Memory Care

An important part of deciding if memory care is the right choice for your family is determining how to pay for it. Here are four of the most common options available for financing a safer, more connected living environment for your loved one.



HOME SALE

Selling a loved one's home makes sense for many families, although it can be an overwhelming task. Reach out to a local senior-focused real estate agent who can assist with everything from preparing the home for listing, to selling and closing, to packing and moving.

BRIDGE FINANCING

You may want or need to take extra time to prepare and sell your loved one's home after they have already moved to memory care. Bridge financing in the form of a home equity line of credit (HELOC) can help in this situation. If approved, you can use HELOC to pay for memory care, while making interest-only payments on the outstanding loan balance until you are ready to sell. Once the home is sold, you may use the proceeds to pay the HELOC in full.

VETERANS AID & ATTENDANCE BENEFIT

If your loved one is a wartime veteran or a surviving spouse of one, the Veterans Aid and Attendance Benefit may help pay for assistance with activities of daily living at a memory care community, based on income and assets eligibility. Contact your local Veterans Affairs office for assistance in evaluating their eligibility and applying for benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

LONG-TERM CARE & LIFE INSURANCE

If your loved one has long-term care insurance, it may benefit them now. Policies typically cover a maximum daily amount for housing and care of a memory care resident who needs assistance with certain activities of daily living. You may also consider converting an unneeded life insurance policy to cash to pay for memory care.

Learn more about ways to pay for memory care here. (LINK)

How Artis Can Help

Supporting people with Memory care needs is our speciaty at Artis.
To empower our residents to live more independently, we build a bridge between their lifelong identity and their present daily life. By gathering a thorough and thoughtful understanding of their history, interests, and personal qualities, we create a structure and routine that promotes better health, reduces stress, and increases engagement and joy.

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OUR HOLISTIC WELL-BEING FRAMEWORK INCLUDES AN OPTIMAL COMBINATION OF THE FOLLOWING:



ENVIRONMENT

Our intentionally designed communities promote safety and independence with the following features:

- Adaptive furniture and features that promote comfort and safety.
- Multiple smaller neighborhoods with their own living room, front porch, dining room, kitchen, bath & laundry
- 10,000+ sq. ft. of indoor space accessible to all residents
- Town Square features a a barbershop and beauty salon, program center, wellness center, and art studio
- Décor that creates a sense of familiarity to eras residents are familiar with
- A secured open air expansive courtyard with walking paths, outdoor patio, porches and seating for rest and family visits
- Thoughtful wayfinding signage
- Residents enjoy the freedom to safely explore all neighborhoods, common areas and outdoor spaces with access to 10-12 exits that encourage exploration



CARE

We provide support with activities of daily living, along with better nutrition and exercise programs to enhance overall well-being. Services include:

- 24/7 supervision by on-site licensed nursing staff
- Associates with dementia care and CPR training on-site at all times
- Daily living assistance with showering, dressing/undressing, grooming, and oral care
- Assistance with using the restroom, personal hygiene, and continence support
- Medication management
- Housekeeping, linens, laundry, and suite maintenance
- Breakfast, lunch, dinner, and anytime snacks, with dietitian-approved menus
- Escorts to meals and events
- More advanced care services are also available based on assessed resident needs

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CONNECTION

We offer daily, well-rounded opportunities for participation and social engagement with neighbors, associates, friends, and family, including:

- **Group Activities** - Engaging in group games, art, or music encourages social interaction and shared experiences.
- **Community Meals** - Shared dining fosters connections and a sense of community through daily interactions.
- **One-on-One Engagement** - Personalized conversations, care delivery and activities build trust and meaningful relationships with intergenerational staff.
- **Family Involvement** - Regular family visits and events strengthen bonds and provide familiar connections.
- **Resident Councils** - Opportunities to voice opinions and participate in decisions encourage collaboration and community spirit.
- **Intergenerational Programs** - Activities with staff, local children create joyful and enriching social interactions.
- **Shared Spaces** - Common areas like living rooms, the Town Square, outdoor patios and gardens promote spontaneous interactions and companionship.
- **Cultural and Religious Events** - Celebrations and rituals connect residents through shared traditions and values.
- **Volunteer and Staff Interaction** - Frequent engagement with caring staff and volunteers ensures residents feel valued and supported.



COGNITIVE SUPPORT

We engage residents in specialized programs and therapies designed to stimulate cognitive function and promote emotional

- **Structured Routines** - Consistent daily schedules reduce confusion and anxiety by providing a predictable, comforting rhythm.
- **Safe & Controlled Environment** - Dementia care settings are designed to minimize risks while fostering independence within a secure space.
- **Sensory Stimulation** - Activities like music therapy and aromatherapy stimulate cognitive function, evoke memories, and enhance mood.
- **Social Interaction** - Opportunities for group activities and one-on-one connections reduce isolation and promote a sense of belonging.
- **Personalized Activities** - Tailored activities based on individual interests and abilities create purpose and maintain personal identity.
- **Nutrition & Physical Health** - Balanced meals and physical activities support overall health, mobility, and well-being.
- **Specialized Care Staff** - Trained caregivers provide compassionate, tailored support to ensure residents feel understood and valued.

ARTIS SENIOR LIVING

We can help your family, too. Give us a call or schedule a tour here.

By honoring and *celebrating* the full spectrum of their life story in a way that works today, we *empower our residents* to retain their personal identity and live more independently.

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