

Taking care of yourself

This help sheet is about the importance of families and carers looking after themselves while caring for someone with dementia. It discusses ways to manage stress and the importance of asking for help.

Caring for someone with dementia can be rewarding. It can also be physically and emotionally demanding. The needs of someone with dementia may increase over time, meaning you will need more time and energy. That's why it is important to take care of yourself.

If you get worn down, caring will become more difficult. It may become hard to balance your needs with those of other people around you and the person with dementia.

It's important that you take care of yourself, to maintain your physical and mental strength and provide better care.

Support is available to help you care for someone with dementia and to take care of yourself.

Dementia Australia is here for you

We know it can be tough. That's why we're here to help. You are not alone.

Support groups

Throughout Australia, there are support groups for carers, in person and online. Many people find these group meetings offer comfort and practical assistance.

Led by a facilitator, each group brings together families, carers and friends of people with dementia. The facilitator is usually a health professional or someone with experience of caring for a person with dementia.

For further information, contact the **National Dementia Helpline** on **1800 100 500**.

Managing stress

Everyone deals with stress in different ways.

It can be useful to learn how to manage stress to improve your own wellbeing.

Tips to try:

- Talk things over with family, friends or people in a similar situation.
- Seek advice from a healthcare professional about ways to manage stress.
- Look after yourself: eat a well-balanced diet, exercise regularly and develop a sleep routine.
- Maintain social contacts and lifestyle activities.
- Be realistic about what to expect of yourself.
- Develop a regular schedule, which can make life easier when living with someone who has dementia.
- Remind yourself that someone with dementia is not deliberately being difficult, but that their emotions and behaviours are affected by dementia.
- Learn about dementia to improve your understanding and confidence.

Getting out and about

It is important to maintain social connections and continue with activities you enjoy, because someone who takes regular breaks will be a better carer.

Some people say they feel guilty when they leave the house or enjoy an activity without the person with dementia. However, it is essential that families and carers follow their own interests.

If you have guilty feelings, it may be a good idea to talk things over with a supportive friend or relative, or a counsellor at Dementia Australia.

Asking for help

Taking care of yourself means asking for assistance now and planning for help you may need in the future.

Seeking help is important – either from people you know, or professionals who have experience in helping people who are caring for others.

You could ask for help from:

- relatives
- friends
- neighbours
- doctors
- psychologists
- counsellors.

Tips to try:

- Try to set up a care routine for the person with dementia that involves other people.
- Suggest specific ways friends and family can help, such as bringing a meal or helping you with housework or shopping.
- Organise regular breaks for yourself; ask a friend or relative to help with care to give you a few free hours or find out about local respite options.
- Speak with Dementia Australia about support services and programs that may be available to you.

Friends and relatives

Caring for someone with dementia can be made more difficult if other people have a lack of understanding. Help friends and relatives understand the situation.

Tips to try:

- Explain that a person may look healthy, but dementia may affect their memory, thinking, behaviour and abilities.

- Give people information help sheets about dementia, available from Dementia Australia in English and other languages.
- Ask people to come for short visits, limiting how many come at any one time.
- Suggest activities for a visit, like going for a walk, looking at a photo album or bringing a simple activity to do together.
- Prepare visitors for changes in communication abilities and suggest ways to help.

Where to get help

There are many places that can help you. People at the following organisations can talk with you about:

- asking for help to take time out for yourself
- planning a break
- understanding what is available.

National Dementia Helpline

The National Dementia Helpline is a free telephone service that provides information and advice. Ask about support groups and programs for family and carers.

Call: **1800 100 500**

Visit: dementia.org.au/helpline

Carer Gateway

Carer Gateway provides free practical information, resources, education and counselling to support carers.

Call: **1800 422 737**

Visit: carergateway.gov.au

My Aged Care

Depending on eligibility, My Aged Care provides support and assistance with home and community care and respite options for people aged 65 and over.

Call: **1800 200 422**

Visit: myagedcare.gov.au

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Depending on eligibility, funding is available to get the support and services you need, including respite care.

Call: **1800 800 110**

Visit: [ndis.gov.au](https://www.ndis.gov.au)

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/family-carers-and-family-members

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