

Partners in a caring role

This help sheet describes some common changes to partner roles and responsibilities when your loved one is living with dementia.

Dementia can affect someone's ability to maintain their daily routine or carry out tasks. Many people living with dementia seek to remain independent for as long as possible. Others seek the support of their partner to help with daily activities.

As dementia symptoms progress and the person's abilities change, you may find yourself gradually taking sole responsibility for tasks previously managed by your loved one. This may happen without you making a conscious decision to do so.

Some tasks may require you to learn new skills. Others may also impact on some aspects of your relationship as you adapt to this new role of 'carer'. You may find that health professionals start identifying you as a 'carer' rather than 'partner'.

It is important to take care of yourself and seek support.

Dementia Australia is here for you

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

Taking over household tasks

Your loved one may gradually lose the ability to perform household chores. As a partner, you may need to take on a greater share of tasks such as meal planning, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry, household maintenance and repairs, or the family finances. For some partners, this may mean learning new skills or different ways of doing things. For this reason, you are encouraged to:

- start assisting the person with dementia as soon as possible, to learn how to do these household chores
- ask your partner to show you how these tasks are done, or ask close family and friends to show you.

Helping with personal care

Your partner may require support to attend to their personal care needs, such as showering, toileting, dressing, styling hair, shaving or applying makeup.

Attending to these needs may feel unfamiliar, which might make you feel uncomfortable.

It is recommended to:

- Seek professional advice for ways to provide support while maintaining the person's dignity and wellbeing, and also your own. You might not be able to perform these tasks right the first few times.
- Ask family and friends for advice on personal grooming tasks.
- Consider inviting a family member or friend familiar with your loved one's likes, dislikes and specific personal needs to shop with you.

Seek emotional connections

When you are in a caring role, ensure you have emotional and social support for yourself.

You may have relied on your partner for emotional support, and to maintain friendships and family contacts.

But as your partner's dementia progresses, they will lose their ability to support you in this way.

Be aware of this and get in touch with people who will support you emotionally and keep you socially connected. Find supportive family and friends, for a safe place to discuss emotional issues.

Take care of yourself

It is important to take care of yourself:

- Pay attention to your diet and exercise.
- Maintain your social contacts.
- Balance your own needs with the daily demands of caring.
- Contact support services to arrange regular respite from your caring role.

- Attend support group meetings and carer education workshops. These are a great way to learn new tips and strategies from professional facilitators as well as from other participants who are going through a similar experience. Many organisations throughout Australia offer support groups for carers.
- Appreciate that even with the best intentions, you may cause some discomfort or agitation for the person you are caring for. Do not judge yourself harshly in these situations and accept that you are providing care in the best way you can. Both of you are learning.

Where to get help

National Dementia Helpline

The National Dementia Helpline is a free telephone service that provides information, advice, counselling and carer support.

Call: **1800 100 500**

Carer Gateway

Carer Gateway provides practical information and resources to support carers.

Call: **1800 422 737**

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

Additional reading and resources

- Dementia Australia library service
Visit: dementia.org.au/library
- Dementia Australia support
Visit: dementia.org.au/support/family-and-carers
- 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