

Tips for visiting

This help sheet is about the importance of regular visits for someone living with dementia. It gives tips about planning a visit and things you can do to enjoy time together. Everyone living with dementia is unique, so when reading these tips, consider the person's abilities, the impact dementia is having on them and their symptoms.

Visiting someone with dementia, in person or on a video call, is important for their emotional wellbeing and keeps them socially connected. Sometimes the impacts of dementia make it difficult for them to communicate or initiate activities, so they may need your help and understanding.

There are simple ways you can make the time together enjoyable and engaging.

Plan your visit

There are things you can do to plan your visit, to help both you and your friend or loved one. If things don't go as you had planned, your visit is still important. Here are some ideas to plan your visit:

- Consider the time of day you visit. Everyone experiences times of high and low energy. Some people living with dementia have more energy in the morning or middle of the day.
- Try and choose a place or activity that the person enjoys so they can relax more easily.

Establish a visiting ritual

Each time you visit, say and do the same things when you arrive and leave. This will add structure for your relative or friend.

It may be helpful to introduce yourself on arrival. For example, say: "Hello Mum: it's me, Elizabeth, your daughter." This reminds the person of your name and connection to them.

Get to know the care staff by name

If you are visiting a care home, introduce yourself and explain your relationship to the person you are visiting.

Start a communication book

A communication book is a book of important facts about the person for visitors and carers to read. It can include information about the key people in their life and can act as a memory prompt to assist with communication.

During your visit

Below are some ways you can make the time together enjoyable and engaging.

Take something with you

Take something to stimulate conversation or do an activity together, such as:

- photos or items collected on holidays, to reminisce or make a memory book together
- music or online music videos to sing, watch, or dance to together
- a magazine or newspaper you can read articles or complete a quiz together
- seedlings to plant together or flowers you can arrange in a vase
- cards or notepaper, to sit down together and write to mutual friends or family
- a food treat or snack to share.

Make a memory book

A memory book can be a project to work on together. It can record the accomplishments in your friend or family member's life. It might include photographs, mementoes, written stories and drawings. Other people caring for the person may also find this resource useful.

Play music or sing

Music can make people feel calm and provoke fond memories.

When you visit, you might:

- play recorded music
- listen to the radio
- play an instrument
- sing or dance together.

Take a pet with you

A visit from a well-loved pet can improve the emotional health and wellbeing of your friend or relative. If visiting a care home, speak to staff before taking your pet with you.

Help with tasks

You might:

- help with food or drinks
- go for a walk together
- sew labels on clothing or mend small items.

Helping with tasks can not only benefit the person, but also help you to feel useful and important.

Communicate without talking

Rather than talking, try hugs, massaging your friend's hands or neck, holding their hand or listening to music. Spend time outside, enjoy the garden or go for a walk.

Silence needn't be negative. Instead, try to enjoy quiet times.

Your feelings**Be kind to yourself**

Visits are important but sometimes can be sad or difficult. Consider going with another person; this may help the visit and afterwards could give you an opportunity to debrief.

Take care of yourself and talk to someone

You may experience a range of different feelings each time you visit. It is important to take care of yourself. Speak to a supportive friend about your feelings or call the **National Dementia Helpline** on **1800 100 500**.

Know that your visit makes a difference

Research suggests that people living in residential care need emotional support for their wellbeing and are less likely to be depressed when they have regular weekly visitors.

Additional reading and resources

- **Dementia Australia library service**
Visit: dementia.org.au/library
- **A Better Visit app**
Visit: dementia.org.au/information/resources/technology/abettervisit
- **Create a memory book**
Visit: discrimination.dementia.org.au/create-family-book
- **Create a carer book**
Visit: discrimination.dementia.org.au/create-carer-book
- **Dementia-friendly communities**
Visit: dementiafriendly.org.au

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