

Being a Caregiver

Some basics on caring for someone who has dementia

This can be one of the hardest challenges in the caregiving role. Your loved one may not know you any more. They may not be able to talk with you or follow simple plans. They may not thank you for all the hard work you are doing. They may have behaviours like yelling, hitting, and wandering away from home. This may make you look at your loved one differently, and may even make you feel angry at times.

Here are some tips to help you with some common challenges:

1. Keep requests simple. Complex tasks and instructions may lead to frustration.
2. Avoid confrontation. Calmly defer requests if your loved one shows signs of anger.
3. Remain calm, firm, and supportive if your loved one does become angry.
4. Be consistent. Try to get into routines and avoid unnecessary change.
5. Provide reminders, supportive explanations, and orientation cues.
6. Recognize when your loved one has difficulty with tasks and adjust your expectations.
7. If you notice a sudden decline in function or new symptoms of illness, be sure to seek medical attention as quickly as possible.
8. It is very helpful to keep a behavioural log, much like a diary. This information will help guide your health team member in providing the best treatment for you and your loved one.

Adapted from Cohen CA, Pringle D, and DeDuc L (2001). *Can J Neurol Sci* 28(Suppl 1): S72-S76.

Some very helpful reading:

Nancy L Mace, and Peter V Rabins (2006). *The 36-Hour Day, 4th Edition: A Family Guide to Caring for People with Alzheimer Disease, Other Dementias, and Memory Loss in Later Life*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press

Anne Robinson, Beth Spencer, and Laurie White (2007). *Understanding Difficult Behaviors: Some Practical Suggestions for Coping with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Illnesses*. Ypsilanti: Geriatric Centre of Michigan