

Dementia Caregiver Tips and Tricks:

Strategies for Successful Care and Communication



Connecticut
NURSING SERVICES



BEING A CAREGIVER

isn't always easy. In fact, it's probably rarely easy. Caregiving is a 24 hour job, that takes both a physical and an emotional toll on you.


Caring for yourself is an important part of caregiving. Without a full reserve, what do you have left to give?

Learning strategies to help you be better prepared to face some of the challenges of providing dementia care is a step in the right direction. Recognizing that you, as the caregiver, need to switch gears and try different approaches is key. They are no longer able to adjust, so we must.

In this guide you will learn easy tips and tricks to help you respond appropriately to your loved one. No one expects you to change overnight, but implementing one tip at a time will help you feel more successful as a caregiver and will let your loved one feel more honored and seen.

Here's your first tip:

FORGIVE YOURSELF - You will make mistakes. Don't let mistakes stop you from trying to be a better caregiver. We all make mistakes, and it's OK.



Helpful Tips and Tricks for Successful Care

01 FORGIVE YOURSELF

Use the mistakes you make as a lesson of what not to do next time.

02 ASK FOR HELP

It's ok to ask for help. If you have trouble asking, make a list ahead of things that will help you. This way when someone asks what they can do, you're prepared to answer.

(playing cards, cooking, mowing the lawn, bring the garbage out, etc.)

03 BE PRESENT

Avoid multi-tasking. You won't give 100% and they'll recognize it. Make eye contact, be at their level, and focus on one task at a time.

04 DON'T QUIZ

Asking multiple questions "what did you eat today?" will only lead to frustration...for both of you. Their memory is impaired, and they won't remember what they ate. Use Yes or No Questions, like "Was lunch good?" which is less intimidating for them to answer.

05 INTRODUCE YOURSELF

This may feel strange at first, but it can be quite helpful. When entering their space (whether it's the 1st or 5th time) greet them. "Hi Mom, It's Stephanie. I'm here to visit with you". If they forgot who you were or why you're there, you just gave them that information without making them ask or feel embarrassed.

06 DON'T ARGUE

You will never win an argument with someone with dementia. They're ability to use reason and judgement is most likely impaired. Arguing will just lead to frustration for both of you. In the big picture, you know you're right. If they think the sky is purple, then look up and say "WOW, I've never seen it that color before".

07 WATCH YOUR ENERGY

Energy is contagious, especially negativity. If you're frustrated or upset allow yourself time to reset. Only attempt to provide care when you are in the right frame of mind.

08 LIMIT DISTRACTIONS

Is the TV on? Is the radio too loud? Are there multiple conversations happening? All of these things can impair the person's ability to understand what you are asking of them.

09 CELEBRATE SMALL VICTORIES

Some days are hard. Even a smile, a shared laugh, or a peaceful moment is a win. Cherish the little things. Remember what worked and try to duplicate that action. Share your positive outcomes with others, they might benefit from a positive story or a new technique.

10 ENSURE SAFETY FIRST

Install grab bars, use non-slip mats, and pay attention to dangerous items. Toiletries, cleaning supplies, and tools can be dangerous. If it may be used inappropriately, keep it out of sight or lock it up.

11 WATCH FOR NONVERBAL CUES

The person with dementia may not be able to SAY what they need, so watch their body language, facial expressions, and behavior. These are all ways of communicating.

12 TAKE A STEP BACK

Respond to their energy. If the task at hand can wait, let it. Forcing a task or trying to get someone to do something they don't want to will only lead to frustration. Learn to step back and re-approach later. Everybody needs apace once in a while.

13 SPEAK CLEARLY

Language is affected by dementia. To make understanding easier, speak slowly and clearly while facing the person.

14 REPEAT YOURSELF

You may feel like you're always repeating yourself but saying it again after waiting for a response might help. If you didn't have their attention they may not have heard, or they may have forgotten the 1st step and need to be reminded what they are doing. Be careful to not repeat yourself too quickly.

15 ALLOW THEM TIME TO PROCESS

They may need more time to process the information they've been given. Allow ample time and try not to rush them.

16 OFFER EXPLANATIONS

While performing care or completing a task, talk to the person. Explain what you are doing and why you are doing it. Encourage them to be part of the process. This will help them stay present and involved and avoid any misunderstandings about why you're doing something 'personal'.

17 RE-APPROACH

If at first you don't succeed, try again! Try with a different tone of voice, a different strategy, different words, or even a completely different task. Use any positive interaction as a steppingstone to the next task.

18 PLAN AHEAD

Plan and prepare for your task before you try to complete it. If you plan on assisting with a shower, make sure to have all the supplies ready accessible. Stepping away to 'get' something is a distraction to both of you and can make it harder to complete the task at hand.

19 SET YOUR EXPECTATIONS

That's right, YOUR expectations. We are asking them to do something. By setting realistic expectations and expecting setbacks there is more likelihood of success. This will create more satisfaction and enjoyment.

20 USE SIMPLE DIRECTIONS

In other words, use step by step directions. Only give the next directions when they have completed the first one. Instead of saying "It's time to use the bathroom and put on your pajamas" say "Let's use the bathroom" or even "Come with me".

21 DON'T SHARE TOO MUCH INFO

If your loved one gets focused on one thing like a Dr.'s appointment, or someone coming over, don't tell them until it's time. The perseveration they have is a coping skill to try to retain the information. If someone else is there to remind or assist them, then wait to share this information.

22 KEEP A ROUTINE

Consistency is a valuable tool for dementia care. setting a routine and following it creates a flow and a sense of comfort for the person with dementia. This doesn't mean you can never vary or do something different. Keeping this routine will help them know what to expect.

23 MAKE CARE FUN

It's ok to laugh, to dance, or to sing. Actually, it's good for both you and your loved ones. Incorporating laughter and music into care can make it more meaningful and successful.

24 MUSIC AS A TOOL

Music is the universal language, and amazingly those with dementia seem to be able to connect just as strongly to music now as they did before. Use Music to assist with caregiving. Use it to set the mood, or to change a negative attitude to a positive one.

25 OFFER CHOICES

Often the Person with Dementia is left out of decision making. Involve them in decision making at the level that works for them. (Do you want to eat out or stay in, do you want fish or chicken, or do you want this or that)

26 MAINTAIN DIGNITY

Help maintain the person with dementia's dignity by using discretion, doing things with them rather than for them, and never speak about them as if they are not there. This fosters a respectful relationship with fewer challenges and obstacles.

27 RESPOND TO EMOTIONS

As dementia progresses, language can become more challenging. If you are struggling to understand what is being said, try responding to the emotion they are showing. Since the person with dementia may not be able to TELL you what is wrong, responding to the emotion can validate their feelings and de-escalate any situation.

30 BATHROOM SCHEDULE

In order to prevent accidents, offer frequent trips to the bathroom. Using the toilet before urgency hits can help avoid embarrassing moments or prevent injury due to haste.

31 WHOSE PROBLEM IS IT

When the person with dementia says no or refuses to do something, evaluate who it is a problem for. Will falling asleep in their clothes hurt them? Will eating dessert first hurt them? If they don't put the blanket in the right spot, whose problem is it? If it's your problem, let it go.

32 LIVE IN THEIR REALITY

The person with dementia may not always be oriented to time or place. When this happens, rather than correcting them, join them. It's much easier to pretend for a few minutes than to deal with a potentially catastrophic reaction. Imagine telling someone asking for their mother that she passed away. Them having absolutely no recollection of that death, a severe reaction would be justified. Instead, try saying that Mom had to grab something at the store, and then talk about your favorite dinner Mom makes.

33 USING FIBLETS

Like we saw above, telling the truth can often be very upsetting for the person living with dementia. So, when necessary, tell 'fiblets'. These little lies are intended to spare their feelings and avoid distressful situations.

34 DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Clothing may become more challenging to manage as dementia progresses. Try using easy on/off clothing. Elastic waisted pants can make using the bathroom easier and keep someone independent longer. Using a zip up could help someone who has difficulty raising their arm.

35 BE A DETEDCTIVE

It can often be challenging to determine what is causing a change in the person we are caring for. Use what you know about the person to help determine what isn't right. If your loved one used to insist on walking every day, but today they are refusing to get out of the recliner, something is wrong. Is there pain? Are they coming down with a cold? Did they not sleep well the night before. You are their best advocate, try to determine what is wrong.

36 TAKE A BREAK

If you are overwhelmed, frustrated, or angry, TAKE A BREAK. Waiting 5 or 10 minutes will not be the end of the world.

Helpful Tips and Tricks for Nutrition & Hydration

- ✓ Eat Together (meals are meant to be social)
- ✓ Pre-cut the food (they may not be able to and can't ask)
- ✓ Offer smaller portions (it won't appear as overwhelming)
- ✓ Use colored tableware (makes seeing the food easier)
- ✓ Keep table setting simple (only put out utensils needed, to keep it simple and easy)
- ✓ Offer frequent snacks, rather than large meals
- ✓ Limit distractions (TV on, people in the next room)
- ✓ Model behavior (use your fork, and see if they mirror you)
- ✓ Get them started (place food on the fork and help them place it in their mouth, often they just need the task initiated)

Helpful Tips and Tricks for Nutrition & Hydration

- ✓ Bake together (it's always enjoyable to eat something fresh from the oven)
- ✓ Plan meals together (Use favorite meals and recipes to keep them excited)
- ✓ Place in their line of sight (Often vision issues can change how we see, therefore we may not see it if you leave it there)
- ✓ Try leaving the plate even if I say I'm not hungry. (often they will start eating from habit)
- ✓ Offer larger meals earlier in the day (Most people eat more at breakfast and lunch. Dinner is typically a lighter meal, don't be surprised if they consume less)
- ✓ Offer grab and Go Food (If the person is restless, try giving them food they can walk with. Fruit, grilled cheese, tenders, etc.)
- ✓ Let them eat when they're hungry (If they ask to eat and are willing, but you weren't planning on eating for another 30 minutes, let them eat.)

Helpful Tips and Tricks for Nutrition & Hydration

- ✓ Offer fruits and vegetables with high water content (this helps increase fluid intake. Strawberries, watermelon, cucumbers, baby carrots and many other fruits are high in water and are an excellent source to combat dehydration.
- ✓ Offer soup with the meal or as a meal to provide extra fluid. (low sodium options are best)
- ✓ Make freezer pops out of Gatorade or Pedialyte. Not only do they increase water, but other electrolytes too.
- ✓ Make hydration social. Have tea together or sit outside with lemonade. (We are more likely to drink with someone than by ourselves)
- ✓ Infuse your water with fruits to add flavor.
- ✓ Avoid caffeine and alcohol. (Even though they are fluid, they actually can contribute to dehydration. Try to slip in Decaffeinated tea or coffee if possible.

ACTIVITIES

- ✓ Engage in mentally stimulating activities (this includes, word searches, trivia, and even conversations)
- ✓ Take 5 minutes to explain, to sit with, to comfort. Those 5 minutes now, can save you many more later by avoiding frustration, behaviors, and/or wandering.
- ✓ Focus on the Process rather than the product. If the person is enjoying painting, let them. If they like coloring, let them. If they enjoy jigsaw puzzles but put the pieces in the wrong place, let them. Afterwards, clean up and start over the next time.
- ✓ Have Fun! Don't forget to laugh, sing, and dance. All of these things are good for your mood and your body.
- ✓ Exercise! Even if it's chair dancing or taking a walk. Moving increases blood flow, increases energy, and boosts mood.
- ✓ Let them do what they can. If you're building a birdhouse, let them sand the wood, pick the color, or sort nails by size. Engagement is key.



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