

# COVID-19 and Wellbeing: Supporting someone with Dementia

The outbreak of COVID-19 has resulted in a range of sudden changes to everyday life. This may be a particularly challenging time for carers supporting somebody with dementia. This document contains some general advice and signposting to support the wellbeing of people with dementia and their carers.

## Keeping up to date

### ➤ Keep up to date with government and NHS advice

Keep up to date with the most recent guidance by accessing reputable sources:

- UK government  
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- NHS  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>  
<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/>

## Supporting someone with Dementia

### Supporting understanding

- Try not to overwhelm the person with too much information
- Consider using signs and prompts around the house
- Use distraction to help the person move on if they are confused or distressed

Try to keep yourself up to date with the most recent government rules and guidelines around hygiene and social distancing. However, it may be difficult for a person with dementia to understand (or remember) the information as it is very complex. Try to simplify the information as much as you can, giving just the most important points.

If they are able to understand your explanation, then it may be helpful to make some prompts around the house to remind them. This could include signs to prompt hand washing and a sign on the door to remind them why they shouldn't go out right now.

If the person you care for is not able to understand the information, or is very distressed, then it is better not to persevere with trying to explain. For example, if they are trying to leave the house, try to distract them with another activity. It may be necessary at times to weigh up the risks – for example, whether the level of distress they will experience if you try

to stop them leaving outweighs the risks of being outside. These are difficult situations and you can only use your best judgement.

### **Routine and structure**

- **Create a new routine within the home**
- **Try to stay physically active**
- **Consider limiting news reports on TV and radio**

People with dementia generally benefit from having a structured routine, with a good balance of activity and rest periods. Unfortunately, it may not be possible to access community resources, such as groups, cafes and day centres. It is helpful to create a new routine within the home in order to stay active and support wellbeing. Maintaining a good routine for eating and sleeping is also important. Consider limiting news reports, such as TV and radio, as this may be unsettling and cause additional anxiety.

“Dementia UK” suggests the following strategies for managing without support groups and day centres:

- “Try to both stay entertained and distracted
- If possible, set up different areas around your home so that you can move from activity to activity: watch favourite films and musicals in the living room. Listen to the radio in the kitchen. Do jigsaw puzzles at the table. If you can, take walks around the garden.
- Ask friends and relatives to bring you films, puzzles, music, games – anything you think the person with dementia might like to do. Again, they can leave these outside the front door for you.
- Staying physically active during this time will help to keep you mentally and physically well. If you feel well enough, and have access to countryside where you will not come into close contact with other people, then try and get outside for a walk. This can become part of a new routine for you, as well as give you both something to talk about when you get back home.
- If you have a garden, go outside when possible – especially now the weather is warming up. Finding things to do outside or simply sitting in whatever sunshine we may get over the next few weeks will help. Fresh air and green space will help lift the spirits and also provide some stimulation. If you can, plant up a few plant pots with seeds or flowers that can be placed near the windows. If you have a garden shed, there may be some projects in there you can try – like making a bird feeder.”

<https://www.dementiauk.org/dementia-uk-coronavirus-advice/>

The “Alzheimer’s Society” provides lots of ideas for activities on their website, and advice for setting up new activities:

- “Put out the things you need before starting an activity, for example, tools for gardening or ingredients for cooking. The person with dementia might like to help you with this.
- Reduce distractions such as background noise.

- Give yourself time and take things at a slower pace if you need to. And be reassuring if the person finds things difficult.”

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/coronavirus-activity-ideas-people-living-dementia>

## Social contact

### ➤ **Maintain social contact using other means, such as telephone and video**

Social contact is important for all of us and is likely to provide reassurance and a feeling of connection. Although face to face contact may be preferable, try to support the person you care for to stay in touch with people using other means. This might be via telephone, video chat, messaging, or sending letters.

## Monitor wellbeing

- **People with dementia can find it difficult to adapt to change**
- **Provide regular reassurance**

People with dementia may experience anxiety, low mood, and difficulty adapting to changes. If they are able to talk about what is going on, listen to their concerns and demonstrate that you are taking them seriously. Provide reassurance and be aware that they may need you to repeat this reassurance often. It is important to be aware that if someone is not able to verbally communicate their feelings, you may see a change in their behaviour that indicates there is a problem. Increased distress, agitation and confusion can also be a sign of an underlying physical health problem, such as an infection.

You can learn more about dementia, mental health and wellbeing via the websites and phone numbers below. If you are concerned about changes in mood or behaviour, you should help the person you are caring for to access support from their GP or other professionals involved in their care.

## Practical considerations

- **Plan ahead for getting food and medication supplies**
- **Ask for help from people you know**

There are lots of practical considerations around getting food supplies, accessing medication and getting help if you need it. It is helpful to plan ahead and talk to people who may be able to support you with grocery shopping and picking up prescriptions.

It is also helpful to consider what would happen in an emergency, if you were not able to provide the care that you usually provide. You can read more about putting contingency plans in place on the carer's UK website: <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/coronavirus-covid-19>

You may want to keep the attached list of phone numbers, plus any other helpful numbers near the phone in case of an emergency.

## People with dementia living alone

- **Help people living alone with prompts, reminders, and deliveries**
- **Use the contact numbers below for advice if you are concerned**

If you support someone with dementia who lives in their own home, many of the above points will still apply. Try to stay in contact to provide explanations and reassurance. Routines might be supported by providing prompts via phone calls and text messages. You can also help by supporting them with deliveries of items they need, such as food and medication. If you are concerned, you can use the contact details below to get advice.

## Taking care of yourself

- **Looking after your own needs is important**
- **This is an uncertain time - it is understandable to find it difficult**

Looking after your own needs is important. We will all experience increased levels of stress and difficult emotions during this time. It might be helpful to consider actions you can take to support your own wellbeing, such as staying in contact with support networks, watching a television programme you enjoy, and getting a balance of activity and rest. Try to be kind to yourself and remember that feeling anxiety, stress, and loneliness during the COVID-19 outbreak is entirely understandable. Remember that this period will eventually pass.

## Sources of Information and Support

- **UK Government**  
**Registering for support if you have a medical condition which makes you extremely vulnerable to coronavirus:**  
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>
- **Alzheimer's society**  
[www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)  
0333 150 3456
- **Dementia UK**  
[www.dementiauk.org](http://www.dementiauk.org)  
0800 8886678
- **Age UK**  
[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)  
0800 678 1602
- **Cheshire Age UK**  
Dementia Support Service: 01606 305029  
COVID-19 helpline: 01606 881660

- **Carer's UK**  
<https://www.carersuk.org/>
- **Silverline - helpline for older people**  
0800 4 70 80 90
- **Snow Angels – befriending service**  
<http://www.snowangels.org.uk/services/snow-angel-services-and-projects/>  
0300 666 6226
- **Cheshire West and Chester Council**  
Adult social care community access team: 0300 123 7034  
Adult social care emergency out of hours: 01244 977277
- **Other important phone numbers**

**You may want to make a note of other numbers that will be helpful to have in one place:**

GP:

Pharmacy:

Care agency:

Other professionals or services involved:

Family and friends who can help: