# Caring for Individuals with Dementia

Dementia is a general term that describes a group of symptoms. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia and can lead to changes in behavior as the disease progresses. These changes may bring new challenges and stress For caregivers and individuals with dementia, the following tips may be helpful.

## Engage in Activities

People with dementia often lose the ability to plan and organize their day. Establishing a routine can help a person with dementia remain active and independent.

- Encourage participation in daily tasks such as setting the table, wiping countertops, and folding laundry. Try not to correct the person if the task is not done properly.
- Ask for help to engage your family member and let them know they are needed. For example, "Will you please help me with the dishes?"
- Be flexible. If the person refuses to do something, it may be because of fear or inability to complete the task. Try asking in a different way or asking again later.
- Do not criticize or correct a person's effort. Offer positive feedback or redirection to another task.

## Introduce New Ways to Communicate

- It is common for people with dementia to experience challenges with communication. They may have trouble remembering what was said or finding the right word to use in a conversation. People with dementia often become quieter over time and do not participate in conversations.
- Introduce yourself each time you provide care.
- Allow the person enough time to respond to your conversation.
- Keep your expression calm and encouraging.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Explain what you are doing one step at a time.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Respond to challenging behavior with support such as, "That must be scary." or "I know this is hard."
- Do not test their memory or remind them that they forgot something.

## Promote Positive Sleep Patterns

People with dementia often experience sleep challenges including sundowning, or late-day confusion. Sundowning is not a disease, it is a set of symptoms which may include difficulty sleeping, anxiety, and restlessness. Take small steps throughout the day to promote quality sleep.

- Encourage a consistent daily schedule. Waking up at the same time every day, scheduling activities in the morning or early afternoon, and getting ready for bed at the same time.
- Increase exposure to natural daylight during the day.
- Avoid excessive napping.
- Keep track of events before sundowning occurs and try to identify triggers.
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine.
- Reduce stimulation during the evening by avoiding violent or loud programming on the TV.
- Offer gentle reorientation and redirection if they need something such as water or to use the bathroom.

## Support Bathing and Hygiene

Accepting help with bathing and grooming is often challenging for people with dementia. They may feel frightened of bathing, or uncomfortable accepting help with a private task.

- Start from a calm place. Gather all supplies that are needed and make the room comfortable, allowing plenty of time.
- Allow them to perform as much of their own personal care as possible. For example, ask them to hold the washcloth or shampoo bottle.
- Give one instruction at a time. You may need to give very specific step-by-step instructions.
- Schedule baths around upcoming events such as going out with family. For example, "Let's wash up before you go to the senior center."
- Be open and adjust your expectations. Try a sponge bath in between showers, or a non-rinse soap with a warm washcloth.

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