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Association for Dementia and Alzheimer's of South Africa

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# Dementia and Practical Tips for Caregivers

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Dementia cause changes in the thinking, remembering, and reasoning of a person. These changes are usually small to start with, but for someone with dementia, they become bad enough to affect their daily life and activities so they will need more help with simple everyday tasks.

## Personal Hygiene

Try to keep a routine, such as bathing, dressing, and grooming at the same time each day; Ensure the bathroom is easily accessible and well-lit. Tell the person what you are going to do, step by step while you help them bath or get dressed. When dressing or bathing, allow the person to do what they still can do. Use a sturdy shower chair to support a person who is unsteady and to prevent falls. Label toiletries to make it easier for them to identify the items. Use toothbrushes with larger handles to encourage independence. A regular toileting routine will help prevent accidents. Guidance to be clear and simple and respect the person's privacy. Buy loose-fitting, comfortable, easy-to-use clothing, such as clothes with elastic waistbands, fabric fasteners, or large zipper pulls instead of shoelaces, buttons, or buckles.

## **Eating and Drinking**

Serve meals in a consistent, familiar place with minimum distractions. Use plates, cups, and tablecloths with colours that contrast with food as that will help a person with dementia to see things better. Serve foods that are easy to eat and provide appropriate utensils, such as a spoon instead of a fork or bowl instead of a plate. Give the person enough time to eat. Offer a variety of healthy foods and give the person choices about what to eat. Keep an eye on their eating to ensure they are getting proper nutrition and staying hydrated.

## **Medication Management**

Consider a system or reminders for helping the person to take medications regularly. Ensure prescriptions are regularly refilled and keep a record of medications taken. Keep medication out of reach to prevent accidents.

## **Mobility**

Encourage the use of a walking stick or walker if the person is usually unsteady. Proper “transfer” methods are needed to avoid injury to both the caregiver and the older person. Use gentle and encouraging prompts when assisting with transfers between sitting, standing, or walking.

## **Encouraging Independence**

Help the person write down to-do lists, appointments, and events in a notebook or calendar. Plan activities that the person enjoys and focus on what they still can do. Encourage the person to keep their keys, wallet, and mobile phone always in the same place. Give the person simple choices to acknowledge them as a person and ensure a sense of control and involvement.

## **Dementia-friendly home environment**

Clear away unused items and remove small rugs, electrical cords, and other items the person may trip over. Make sure all rooms and outdoor areas the person visits have good lighting. See that stairs are clearly marked to be more visible and have handrails fitted. Fit handrails especially in the bathroom and next to the toilet. A handrail fitted alongside stairs is useful. Remove or lock up cleaning and household products (paint thinner, matches, candles). Switch off stoves and other appliances at the mains and avoid unattended open fires.

## **Stimulation Activities**

Consider different activities the person can do to stay active, such as household chores, cooking and baking, exercise, and gardening. Match the activity to what the person can do. Add music to exercises or activities if it helps motivate the person. Dance to the music if possible. Be realistic about how much activity can be done at one time. Take a walk together each day.

## **Seek Professional Help**

Consult healthcare professionals, occupational therapists, or dementia specialists for guidance on specific challenges.

In providing the best care for the person with dementia remember to adapt to the changing needs and preferences, be patient, compassionate and maintain a positive attitude as you help them live well with dementia.