



adasa

Association for Dementia and Alzheimer's of South Africa

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Living well with Dementia diagnosis

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Dementia is a journey, not a destination. A diagnosis of dementia can be difficult to cope with, you may feel afraid, hopeless or shocked. Some people feel relieved that they have an explanation for the symptoms and changes they have been experiencing. It is natural to have conflicting feelings, give yourself time to process your feelings and come to terms with your diagnosis and to plan for the future.

Dementia not only affects you (the person with dementia) but it has a huge impact on your close relatives, family, friends, neighbours, and other people you meet. Start by learning as much as you can about dementia. Discuss your concerns, the symptoms, and the stages with psychologists, doctors, or social workers. Understanding what to expect can help you feel more confident and empowered to create a dementia care plan that fits your needs and to maintain your quality of life. Focus on what you still can do.

1. Medical treatment

There is no cure for dementia, for some types of dementia medication is available to help manage the symptoms (anxiety, depression, insomnia, and agitation) and to slow the progression of the disease in the early stages. It is important that you tell your GP if you experience any side effects (nausea) or an increase in confusion or the aggravation of existing dementia symptoms so that they can try a different kind of medication. Supportive intervention can also help ease symptoms.

2. Health

With age, there are changes in our immune system, that make older people more susceptible to infections. Try to eat balanced meals and exercise regularly. Discuss your alcohol intake with your GP as it can increase confusion and disorientation. Have regular check-ups as poor vision/hearing/painful teeth/gums/dentures can create additional stress and anxiety.

3. Emotional support

Join a support group online or in person that offers a safe supportive environment where you can find information, get advice, and share emotions and experiences. You can connect and relate to people in similar situations to be encouraged on your journey. Tell your family and friends about the changes that are taking place. Educate them about the disease and tell them how they can be of support. You are not alone, reach out.

4. Routine

Daily routines are reassuring. Try to create a daily schedule of routine activities and stick with it. Slow down your pace so that you can still do things independently, even though it takes a bit longer; keep on visiting people and enjoy short holidays for as long as possible.

5. Dementia-friendly home

Dementia causes a number of changes in the brain and body that may affect safety. With creativity and flexibility, you can create a home that is both safe and supportive of your needs for social interaction and meaningful activity. Use memory aids, clocks, and calendars in the house; keep important/helpful contact numbers visible; label drawers and cupboards to remind you where things are kept. Remove potential fall hazards such as loose rugs or electrical cords, utilize non-slip mats in the bathroom, and ensure that lighting throughout the house is sufficient.

6. Assess safety on the road

Dementia can cause loss of memory, limited concentration, vision, and insight problems. This may affect your judgment and ability to drive safely. Look for possible signs that it might be time to stop driving.

7. Organize financial and legal matters

Keep your important documents (a list of bank accounts, tax returns, vehicle documents, mortgage, bills, and pension details) in an easily accessible place. This is a good time to prepare or update your last will and testament, living will, financial and medical power of attorney. An attorney or certified planner can help you to plan for essential legal and financial matters.

8. Plan for the future

As dementia progressed, you will need more help. Establish support networks early on so you can enjoy support and assistance when needed. Get assistance from family members, and start researching long-term care homes in the area or possible private live-in caregivers in the community who can help you.