

Dementia - men and caring

Many men find themselves caring for a person with dementia. Most of these men are caring for their partners, although male carers may also include sons, brothers and friends. Caring for someone with dementia can be very demanding.

Taking over household tasks

In many homes, it is often the woman who takes the main responsibility for meal planning, cooking, cleaning and laundry, and for many of the other jobs that keep a household running. If the woman has dementia, she will gradually be unable to continue doing these tasks.

The man in the caring role may need to begin assisting the person who has dementia, perhaps by asking the person to show them how to do things. For some men, taking responsibility for these jobs may mean learning new skills or ways of doing things.

Helping with personal tasks

A male caregiver may need to provide personal and intimate care for the person with dementia, particularly as the illness progresses. Assistance may be needed with bathing and toileting. The person with dementia may also need help to apply makeup, put on pantyhose or arrange for hairdressing, all of which – for most men – are entirely new experiences.

New challenges from everyday tasks

Some things that have been part of everyday life may become more complex. For instance, buying a bra for a woman with dementia can present a challenge for many men. Helping try on new clothes can be difficult when the person with dementia needs assistance in the ladies' change room.

Losing the emotional support of a partner

Generally, men do not have the extensive support systems that most women have. They often rely on their partners for emotional support and to maintain friendships and family contacts that make up most of their support systems.

As dementia progresses, the ability of the woman to provide emotional support and maintain friendships and family contacts will be gradually lost. It is important that the man in the caring role is aware of these changes and takes action to ensure that they both have social and emotional support.

Men need support too

It is important for the man in the caring role to be supported as well.

- It is important for all families and carers to take good care of themselves. Some men may need to pay more attention to their diet and exercise.
- It is essential to maintain social contacts.
- Balancing the carer's own needs with the day-to-day needs of caring can be difficult, but is important.
- Arrange regular breaks from caring so as not to get worn down. Use of day centres, in-home respite and regular residential respite are helpful ways to get breaks, so that carers can keep going. Regular breaks are also important for people with dementia.
- Some men find it helpful to talk with other men who are caring for someone with dementia. Alzheimer's Australia can link people to a large number of support groups throughout Australia. Many people find comfort and practical assistance by attending these meetings with others who know what it is like to care for a person with dementia. Support groups bring together families, carers, relatives and friends of people with dementia under the guidance of a group facilitator who is usually a health professional or someone with first-hand experience of caring for a family member. There is no charge for attendance.
- Finding a safe place to air emotional issues is important. Supportive family and friends, as well as support groups, help many men who are caring for someone with dementia.

Where to get help

- Commonwealth Carelink Centres Tel. 1800 052 222 – provide information about the range of community care programs and services available to help people stay in their own homes
- Commonwealth Carer Resource Centres Tel. 1800 242 636 – provide carers with information and advice about relevant services and entitlements
- Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres Tel. 1800 059 059 – will assist you to find out how to take a break from caring
- Alzheimer's Australia Vic, National Dementia Helpline Tel. 1800 100 500
- Carers Victoria 1800 242 636

Things to remember

- Caring for someone with dementia can be very demanding. For many men, it can present extra challenges.
- For some men, taking responsibility for household jobs and being a carer may mean learning new skills.
- It is important to take care of yourself (pay attention to diet and exercise), maintain social contacts, have regular breaks from caring, talk with other men in the same situation and find a safe place to air emotional issues.
- Family and friends, as well as support groups, can help you cope with caring for someone with dementia.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Alzheimer's Australia Victoria

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