



God is our refuge and strength (Psalm 46:1)

How do I help someone ...

... who is living with dementia?

What is dementia?

The best way to start helping someone with Dementia is to understand what the condition actually is, and how this medical condition is physically impacting the person. Dementia is not just forgetfulness, it is a physical degeneration of the brain so that the brain's normal functions are unable to be performed as they have in the past. In other words, as nerves in the brain die and are not replaced, the brain does not work as well as it used to, and gradually the actual size of the brain shrinks and more and more functional ability is lost. Memories - first short term memories and gradually long term memory as well; physical abilities such as walking and talking and swallowing may be lost – it just depends on which area of the brain is impacted by nerves not functioning as they did previously.

What does this mean to the person experiencing the loss of function? For the most part, absolutely terrifying! Grief. Frustration. Worry about the impact on the family. Financial concerns. It's not difficult to imagine, and when one understands how the person with the onset of Dementia must be feeling, then one is more patient and sympathetic in one's interactions with them.

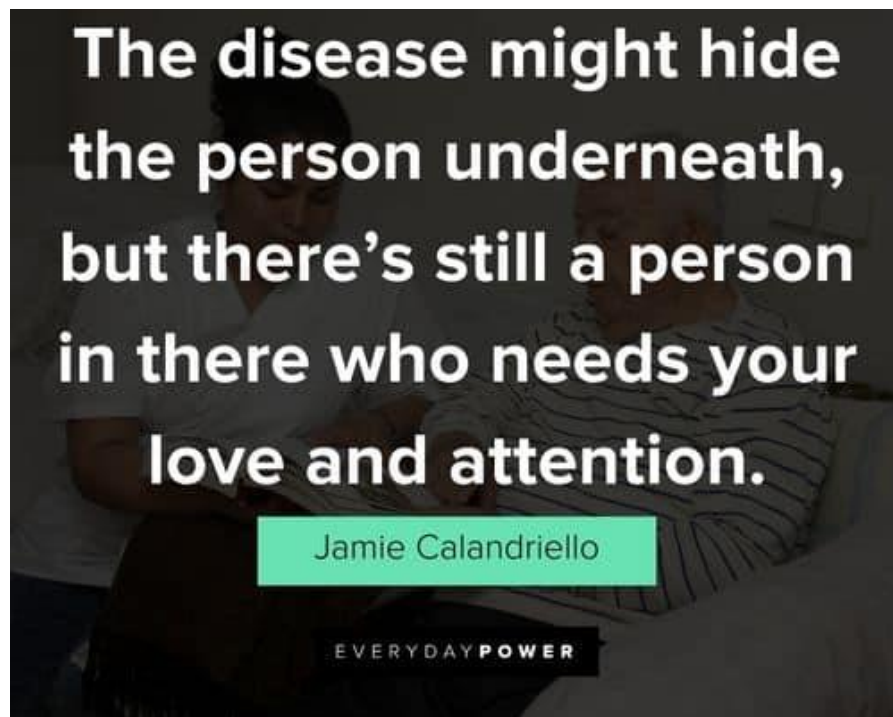
Let's have a look at some strategies:

1. Be kind (fruit of the Spirit).
2. Be very patient (fruit of the Spirit).
3. Understand they cannot "learn" like a child is able to, who's brain is growing and developing. This person's brain is shrinking and dying.
4. Be respectful. The person is NOT a child, even if their behaviour is childish. They cannot help it. Do not patronise them or ridicule them.
5. Be loving (Fruit of the Spirit). Even if they cannot understand what you're saying or doing, they can understand how you make them feel. Treat them as you would Jesus – "as much as you have done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me".

6. View things from their perspective: how would you feel if you couldn't remember something – a word, a name, an event? How you would feel if a stranger (someone you didn't recognise) was touching you, talking to you, giving you instructions?
7. Gentle touch on a hand or a shoulder can be very reassuring.
8. Encourage them to communicate with you.
9. Do things together that are deeply familiar: praying, breaking bread, Bible Readings, singing, walking together – whatever was/is important to them.

(I looked after a brother with Dementia who was beyond excited when his wife brought in his Bible in its leather case. He was so proud to show it to everyone and wanted me to sit and read it to him every time he saw me. I found it so beautiful that this was the most important thing to him, other than his wife visiting. What an example to us all!)

10. Distract them if they are bored, irritable or anxious.
11. Be comforting and reassuring rather than bossy and 'lecturing'.
12. Give them food they know and love.
13. Never force them to do something.



Communication

- Always introduce yourself.
- Speak slowly and clearly. Short, simple sentences.

Care Through Each Stage of Dementia

Early Stage

Promote early and optimal management

- Diagnosis and identification
- Future planning
- Researching aids and services
- Explore treatments which may stabilise cognitive decline
- Identifying and providing referrals for support groups and services.
- Social and emotional support

Moderate Stage

Promote early and optimal management

- Education for loved ones
- Auxiliary care
- Management of non-related illnesses
- Help around the home
- Oral care

Advanced Stage

Promote early and optimal management

- Personal care assistance
- Incontinence management
- Assistance with in and out of home respite
- Feeding and meal preparation

- **DO NOT ARGUE** or try to reason with them. Generally, the capacity to reason is lost, and if they think it is red not blue, or Tuesday not Saturday, it's really not important. Arguing upsets them because they're fearful of angry voices or of being wrong **AGAIN**, or confused again. Let it go.

- Make eye contact with them and encourage them to look at you when either of you are speaking. Stop what you're doing and give them your full attention.

- Give them time to respond – don't interrupt them, even if you think you know what they want to say.

- Let them speak for themselves as much as they are able, in discussions about their own health and wellbeing.

- Acknowledge what they have said, even you don't understand what they are saying, but rather encourage them to explain further, if they can.

- Avoid topics you know will upset them.
- Give them simple choices – not too long or complicated options.
- Rephrase questions so they can give simple answers.
- Repeat their answers back to them to ensure you have an accurate understanding.
- Minimise distractions (TV, radio, background noise), especially if they already have hearing problems.
- Don't say "I told you so!"
- Don't say "Do you remember . . .?" Rather ask them to tell you about something (even if you've heard the story before). "Tell me about where you grew up?" "Tell me how you met your husband?"

Here are some commercial posters that summarise some issues very helpfully:

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12 WAYS TO CREATE AN EMPOWERING DEMENTIA ENVIRONMENT



BY BEVERLY MOORE
CPI CERTIFIED INSTRUCTOR

- 1. DEVELOP PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITIES.** *Negative behaviors are often a result of boredom or frustration.*
- 2. SPEAK FACE TO FACE,** *no more than three feet away from the person. Being on her left side helps activate her social right brain.*
- 3. GAIN THE PERSON'S ATTENTION.** *Use few and common words. Wait for responses, because processing is slowed.*
- 4. MAKE CONSPICUOUS WHAT YOU WANT HIM TO NOTICE;** *camouflage what you wish to have him avoid.*
- 5. KEEP ITEMS IN PLAIN VIEW FOR POSITIVE RESPONSES TO A TASK.** *Procedural memory lasts the longest.*
- 6. DO NOT ARGUE;** *you will lose.*
- 7. VALIDATE THE EMOTION YOU HEAR.** *("You sound afraid.")*
- 8. DO NOT DISAGREE WITH HER SENSE OF REALITY;** *it is her only reality now. Enter her reality.*
- 9. ORIENT.** *("Bruce, it's Monday morning; time for breakfast.")*
- 10. SIMPLIFY EVERYTHING.** *Make it possible for her to DO things in small steps.*
- 11. FIND THE TRIGGER TO THE BEHAVIORS YOU WISH TO DECREASE.** *Negative behaviors are often due to fear and/or confusion.*
- 12. OFFER CHOICES** *(no more than two); it empowers.*



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Things you should know about...

DEMENTIA AND SLEEP

- Up to half the people with dementia have difficulty with sleeping.
- Good sleep is important for people with dementia to improve daytime function.
- Patients with dementia might be tired during the day, but not be able to sleep well at night.
- It is best to keep the same sleep/wake times and routine as before the dementia began.
- Some dementia drugs may also affect sleep.
- It is good to nap during the day and the best time for this is before lunchtime.
- Incidents of night wandering can be reduced.

Sleep Health Foundation

Would you like to contribute on this or any other topic? Please do! [You can use the Contact Us form.](#)

