

# Dementia

*This document outlines what people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias typically experience through the disease process.*

## Supporting a loved one who is in the **early/mild** stage of dementia

In the early stages of dementia, your loved one will start to need more cues and reminders to help with his/her memory. You may find your loved one now has more difficulty with:

- Keeping appointments
- Remembering familiar places or people
- Managing money
- Cooking
- Keeping track of medications
- Planning or organizing
- Transportation

During this stage, you may also notice some of the following:

- Personality changes
- Wandering
- Withdrawal from activities he/she previously enjoyed

When speaking and interacting with your loved one, be patient when he/she struggles to remember words and names:

- Avoid open-ended questions and instead ask questions that require a yes/no answer
- Provide limited choices (two or three)
- Use different words if your loved one is having trouble understanding what you are saying

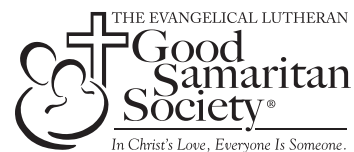
Be flexible when offering support and supervision, and consider the following strategies to engage your loved one in activities:

- Encourage involvement in daily household activities
- Relate activities to work life/former occupation
- Offer favorite past activities
- Help get the activity started
- Break activities into simple steps
- Assist with difficult parts of tasks

Frame interventions and redirection positively:

- Instead of focusing on mistakes, say "Let's try this way."
- Avoid negative comments such as, "Don't do (this)," and instead say, "Please do (this)."

The support you provide should match your loved one's abilities. Consider ways to work together and remember to "partner with" and not "do for" your loved one. By focusing on your loved one's strengths, you can help him/her to remain as independent as possible.



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## Supporting a loved one who is in the **middle/moderate** stage of dementia

Now that your loved one is moving into the middle/moderate stage of dementia, you can expect to see more noticeable changes in memory, increased challenges with performing daily routine tasks, and possible changes in sleep patterns. In this stage, your loved one may no longer remember his/her address, telephone number, high school or home town. You may see more confusion about place and time, and difficulty remembering family members (including siblings, children and grandchildren).

Your loved one may also start to have more challenges with verbal communication. At times, you may see him/her confusing words and having difficulty expressing thoughts. Your loved one may start communicating a need or desire through behaviors or emotional responses. You can help by:

- Providing gentle reminders or cues to replace your loved one's memory loss
- Keeping your communication simple and using concrete words
- Speaking slowly and clearly, and using physical gestures to reinforce your message
- Identifying yourself each time you visit or approach your loved one
- Communicating by singing a familiar song

In this stage, you may start to see:

- Increased frustration, anger, moodiness or being withdrawn
- Greater inclination to wander and become lost
- More significant behavior changes such as suspiciousness and paranoia, repetitive questions/statements, hallucinations, delusions and impulsiveness
- Resistance to care including refusal to bathe, brush teeth or change clothing

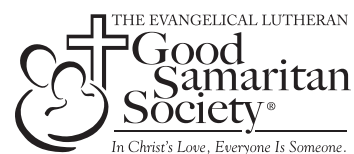
When these things occur, you can help by:

- Not taking the behavior personally
- Remaining calm
- Offering reassurance
- Using cues around your loved one to try to figure out the underlying/root cause of the behavior
- Not trying to convince your loved one that what he/she believes is untrue or inaccurate

Adjust activities as your loved one's dementia worsens. Be flexible when offering support and supervision with activities. Provide support and encourage involvement by:

- Helping to get the activity started
- Breaking activities into simple steps
- Assisting with difficult parts of the tasks

The support you provide should match your loved one's abilities. Consider ways to work together and remember to "partner with" and not "do for" your loved one. By focusing on your loved one's strengths, you can help him/her remain as independent as possible.



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## Supporting a loved one who is in the **late/severe** stage of dementia

Now that your loved one is in the later stages of dementia, you may notice that he/she has limited movement, no longer responds to his/her environment, uses few words, and primarily communicates non-verbally (such as with eye movements or facial expressions). Your loved one may not be able to stand, walk, sit or even swallow, and will likely require extensive assistance with daily activities. A compromised immune system and lack of reserves to fight off illness may also leave your loved one vulnerable to infections. In this stage, your primary focus is supporting your loved one's quality of life and dignity.

When visiting with your loved one:

- Limit the number of people present (too many can be overwhelming and confusing)
- Take the lead to initiate a conversation
- Know that responses may be limited
- Do not expect him/her to talk or express his/her needs clearly with words
- Listen carefully to sentence fragments
- Watch for sounds, utterances, gestures and body movements
- Remember that even though your loved one may have lost the capacity to respond, he or she is taking in what you are saying and enjoying your visit

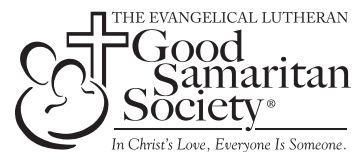
Losing the ability to communicate with words can be very upsetting and may cause your loved one to scream, yell or call out. If this happens, consider the following approaches:

- Offer reassurance in a calm, low voice
- Look for cues around your loved one to figure out what is causing the behavior
- Be alert for unmet needs such as hunger, thirst, pain, toileting or being hot/cold

A person living with late-stage dementia experiences the world mostly through the senses. You can support and engage your loved one through sensory stimulation activities that involve one of the five senses (sight, sound, taste, smell and touch):

- **Sight:** looking at pictures or old photos, watching birds at a feeder/bird aviary, sitting outside
- **Sound:** being outside to enjoy nature, playing favorite music or nature sounds, listening to old radio programs, reading from books that are of interest, singing favorite songs/hymns
- **Taste:** eating favorite foods, playing guessing games using various tastes
- **Smell:** cooking, brewing coffee, popping popcorn, baking bread, practicing aromatherapy
- **Touch:** feeling various fabrics, folding items, sorting through costume jewelry, holding onto worship-related symbols, rubbing scented lotions on hands, brushing your loved one's hair

The support you provide should match your loved one's abilities. By focusing on your loved one's remaining abilities, you can preserve his/her dignity and quality of life, and help him/her remain as independent as possible.



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