



Looking After Yourself –

If you have been diagnosed with dementia

Looking after yourself – If you have been diagnosed with dementia

If you have recently been diagnosed with dementia, you may be worried and anxious about the changes you have noticed.

You may feel angry, frustrated or upset about the changes in your life, but remember:

- you are still the same person
- you will have good days and bad days
- each person is affected differently and symptoms will vary, and
- you are not alone – there are people who understand what you are going through, and can help.

There are a number of ways to help you remain as independent as possible and continue to enjoy life for a long time to come.

Look after your health

Engaging in regular physical activity is good for both physical and mental health and has a number of benefits for people with dementia. It can assist in avoiding, delaying or reducing some of the mobility problems associated with dementia, as well as helping to slow the decline in mental capacity, communication and social participation.

Exercise helps to reduce stress and depression, which are commonly experienced by people with dementia. It can also reduce your risk of developing diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, colon cancer and obesity.

It is recommended that you do 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, such as brisk walking or dancing, on most days of the week.

Excessive stress can be linked to reduced memory capacity and poor sleep. Both mental and physical exercises are very good ways of dealing with stress and its accompanying effects.

Nutrition is an essential part of good health. It underpins healthy growth and development, contributes to your general health and wellbeing and plays a key role in preventing disease and disability. For people with dementia it is important to maintain a healthy weight by balancing eating well with regular activity. A dietician or doctor can advise you about good nutrition.

Look after your feelings

The changes caused by dementia may bring about a range of different emotions. This is very common and it may help you to share them with someone you trust. You may like to join a support group and meet others who have dementia to share experiences and ideas for coping with the condition.

MANAGING MEMORY LOSS

Tips for managing memory loss

- **Keep a diary or notebook of important things to remember and try to keep it with you.**
- **Establish a regular daily or weekly routine, which can help reduce reliance on your memory.**
- **Put up a white board or pin board in a prominent place such as the kitchen. Use it to write important things to remember for the day or week.**
- **Keep a special spot for important items such as glasses, wallets, keys and medicines.**

Consider your driving safety

A diagnosis of dementia does not necessarily mean that you have to stop driving immediately. However, your illness will eventually affect your judgement and ability to drive safely.

In most States and Territories, drivers must tell their licensing authority of any condition that might affect their ability to drive. Dementia is one such medical condition that needs to be disclosed.

The licensing authority will provide you with a medical form to be completed by your doctor. Your doctor will assess whether it is safe for you to keep driving. If your doctor determines that dementia is affecting your ability to drive, then the licensing authority can place conditions on your licence. These conditions might be that you may only drive near your home or that you may only drive at certain times of the day. Regular medical and driving tests will be required.

Any changes in your abilities may mean you should stop driving to ensure your safety and the safety of others. Consider having a family member or friend drive with you at least monthly to monitor your driving skills and safety.

Giving up driving can be a very difficult thing to do, especially if your car is an important part of your independence. Many people find that there are benefits in no longer driving. The alternatives, such as walking, public transport or getting a lift with family or friends can be less stressful than driving, cost less and allow you to enjoy the scenery along the way.

Other tips for looking after yourself

- Give yourself more time to do things.
- If something is difficult, try to take a break for a while.
- If you are having trouble finding the right word to express your thoughts or understanding what people are saying, take your time and tell them that you have a problem with communication.