

MEN IN A SUPPORTIVE ROLE

This Help Sheet describes some of the issues that may affect men who support a person with dementia.

Many men find themselves caring for someone with dementia. Most will support their wives, although many other men, will support their mothers, daughters, sisters and friends.

The symptoms of dementia can be quite challenging for the person with dementia, which may lead to life changing circumstances. These changes may impact on some aspects of the relationship and the role held by the person supporting the person with dementia.

Men who move into this supportive role may often be identified as the carer. Men can face a number of challenges when having to adapt to this new caring role.

Taking over household tasks

In many homes it is often the woman who takes the main responsibility for meal planning, cooking, cleaning, laundry and many of the other jobs that keep a household running. If the woman has dementia, she will gradually become unable to continue to do these tasks. The man in the caring role may need to begin assisting the person with dementia, perhaps by asking to be shown how to do these things. For some men, taking responsibility for these tasks may mean learning new skills or different ways of doing things.

Helping with personal skills

A male assisting a person with dementia may need to provide personal and intimate care, particularly as the illness progresses. Assistance may be needed with bathing and toileting. The person with dementia may also need help with dressing, hairdressing and applying makeup. For most men, these would represent new and unfamiliar experiences, which might make them feel uncomfortable. Male carers may need to seek help from other females, family or friends to learn how to perform these tasks.

New challenges of 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 to 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 the 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 all families and carers to take care of themselves. You may need to pay more attention to your diet and exercise
- It is essential to maintain social contacts
- Balancing your own needs with the day to day demands of caring can be difficult, but is important
- Arrange regular respite from caring so that you don't get worn down. Contact support services to find out ways to arrange a respite
- Some men find it helpful to talk with other men who are also caring for someone with dementia. Alzheimer's Australia can put you in touch with other men in a similar role
- Find a safe place to air emotional issues. Supportive family and friends, as well as support groups, help many 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 and friends of people with dementia under the guidance of a group facilitator. The facilitator is usually a health professional or someone with first-hand experience of caring for a person with dementia

Who can help?

- **My Aged Care: 1800 200 422**

The Australian Government's My Aged Care contact centre and website www.myagedcare.gov.au is your starting point to access a range of aged care services

- **National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500**

A free confidential phone and email information and support service for anyone interested in dementia, concerned about their memory, anybody who has been diagnosed with dementia or who works with people with dementia, or anybody who simply wants to know more

- **National Respite for Carers Program: 1800 052 222**

Provides access to a variety of respite services as well as access to extra social opportunities

- **Dementia Support Australia: 1800 699 799**

Provides support to carers of people with dementia who have behavioural and psychological symptoms that are impacting on their care

- **Carers Victoria: 1800 242 636**

Short term counselling for carers, carer advice and information and links to support groups

- **National Continence Helpline: 1800 330 066**

A free telephone advisory service staffed by a team of continence nurse advisors who provide information, education and advice to callers with incontinence or who are caring for someone with incontinence

- **Nurse on Call: 1300 60 60 24**

A phone service that provides immediate, expert health advice from a registered nurse, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Alzheimer's Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at fightdementia.org.au



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**