



A Caregiver's Guide to Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia

*The
Bristol*
ASSISTED LIVING

Caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or other type of dementia can be rewarding, but it is not without its challenges. Many caregivers have difficulty juggling the needs of their mom or dad, while also fulfilling their other responsibilities at home and work.

As leaders in the field of memory care, The Bristal has over two decades of experience in caring for seniors with memory-related cognitive disorders. We've developed this resource guide to help families who want to provide the best care possible for their loved ones but might struggle with some common issues caregivers face.

Whether you are a new caregiver or need help troubleshooting a challenging behavior, this guide is filled with practical tips to help make caregiving a little easier.

If you have questions or need help, please don't hesitate to contact us.

The Bristal Team



Table of Contents

Coping With a Dementia Diagnosis pg 4

- Resources for Dementia Caregivers
- Understanding the Stages of Dementia
- Tips for Selecting Appropriate Care

Common Caregiver Concerns pg 8

- How to Combat Dementia Fatigue
- Addressing Wandering Behavior and Wanting to Go Home
- Dealing With Delusions, Aggression, and Sundowning

Supporting a Loved One With Dementia pg 18

- Maintaining Independence in People With Dementia: Tips for Caregivers
- Communication Tips for People With Dementia
- Relaxation Techniques for People With Dementia
- Taking Care of Yourself as a Dementia Caregiver

What to Know About Memory Care Communities pg 25

- When It's Time for Memory Care
- How to Choose a Memory Care Community
- Reflections at The Bristol

Coping With a Dementia Diagnosis

If your loved one has recently been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or dementia, you are likely searching for information on what to expect and how to provide the best care possible. In the following sections, you will find a brief overview on memory-related cognitive illnesses and resources for caregivers.

Resources for Dementia Caregivers

You may want to bookmark the resources listed below, which offer practical information for caregivers on a variety of topics. We've also included a list of support groups in the tri-state area. These groups can offer caregivers a place to receive support, express their emotions, and discover tips for coping with the common challenges of caregiving.

National Resources

- [National Institute on Aging](#)
- [Alzheimer's Association](#)

Local Support Groups for Caregivers

- Long Island — [Long Island Alzheimer's & Dementia Center](#)
- Hudson Valley — [Alzheimer's Association](#)
- New York City — [CaringKind](#)
- New Jersey — [Alzheimer's New Jersey](#)



Understanding the Stages of Dementia

What is Dementia?

Dementia is an umbrella term used to describe a category of memory-related cognitive disorders. Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia and is a progressive disease that negatively impacts memory, thought capacity, and the ability to function independently.

Dementia and Alzheimer's disease are not a normal part of aging. While some memory loss as people get older is natural, that's different from dementia and the intellectual, social, and cognitive impairments that come with it.

Signs of Memory Loss Versus Signs of Dementia

While forgetfulness may be unsettling or frustrating, it isn't necessarily a sign of dementia. A key difference between normal age-related memory loss and dementia is the severity and frequency of the symptoms, as in the examples below:

- Normal aging is not being able to remember details of a conversation or event that took place a year ago.
 - Dementia is not being able to recall details of recent events or conversations.
- Normal aging is not being able to remember the name of an acquaintance.
 - Dementia is not recognizing or knowing the names of close family members.
- Normal aging means occasionally having trouble finding words.
 - Dementia can mean frequent pauses and substitutions when finding words.
- Normal aging is worrying about your memory, even if your relatives are not.
 - Dementia is when your relatives are worried about your memory, but you are not aware of any problems.

If you are concerned about your loved one's symptoms, it is best to schedule an appointment for an evaluation. Not all memory loss is caused by dementia – medication side effects, certain illnesses, and vitamin deficiencies can lead to similar symptoms, which a doctor can determine.

What Are the Stages of Dementia?

Alzheimer's and other types of dementia are typically classified into three stages: early (mild), middle (moderate), and late (severe). As the disease progresses, people have more trouble with memory, daily tasks, and thinking ability.

Early:

The person may still function independently but have trouble with tasks, such as remembering names, finding items, and planning for the future.

Middle:

Usually the longest, the middle stage is marked by an increased difficulty with short-term and long-term memory, finding familiar places, wandering, and other behavioral changes.

Late:

This is the most advanced stage of the disease. A person with late-stage dementia will need constant care and supervision.

Understanding what stage of the disease your loved one is in can help you better provide or select the best care for them.



Tips for Selecting Appropriate Care

While there is no cure for dementia at this time, there are treatments that can help improve the quality of life for someone who has been diagnosed.

Drug treatments cannot stop the progression of the disease, but they can help improve cognitive functioning and alleviate some symptoms. After evaluating your loved one, a doctor can help you decide on the best treatment options.

Because of the loss of physical and mental capabilities, it can be difficult to care for a person with dementia – especially during the later stages of the disease. If you plan on serving as a primary caregiver for a loved one with dementia, make sure you fully understand the progression of the disease and what care will be required.

If you plan to have your loved one live with you, consider:

- Will it be easy for someone with dementia to navigate? For instance, are there stairs or uneven surfaces that might cause a fall?
- Do you have small children or pets that could trip up someone who has trouble walking?
- Is your bathroom set up so you'll be able to help your loved one bathe and use the toilet?

Guilt is a common emotion most caregivers experience. It is normal to feel as though you aren't doing enough, or to be frustrated by your loved one's behavior. Caring for someone with dementia can be a rewarding experience, but it is often physically and emotionally demanding.

If at-home caregiving isn't right for you and your loved one, or if you realize you need more help as their dementia progresses, consider a memory care community as an option. Memory care communities are designed to provide a safe and secure environment where individuals with dementia can live as independently as possible, while engaging in meaningful activities. Learn more about professional memory care on page 25.

Common Caregiver Concerns

From sleep disturbances to wandering, there are numerous challenges that caregivers may encounter on a daily basis. The following section offers practical tips on addressing common caregiver concerns.

How to Combat Dementia Fatigue

Dementia fatigue is a term used to describe the drop in energy levels common in early Alzheimer's. While people usually associate memory loss and confusion with the beginning stages of the disease, low energy is an equally challenging symptom to manage.

Determining the cause and finding ways to safely improve energy levels without increasing agitation can help you improve the quality of life for your loved one.

What Causes Low Energy for People With Alzheimer's Disease?

There are a variety of factors that may be contributing to chronic fatigue for a person living with Alzheimer's. They include:

Depression: It is estimated that 40 percent of people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease also suffer from depression. A loss of independence, lower self-esteem, problems concentrating, and involuntary lifestyle changes are all contributing factors for depression in individuals with depression.

Sleep Problems: Another factor may be difficulty sleeping. Researchers believe the damage that Alzheimer's disease causes within the brain also disrupts the body's natural circadian rhythm. Even though they may be physically exhausted, a person with Alzheimer's may be unable to sleep for extended periods.

Medication Side Effects: Some medications commonly prescribed for older adults can cause drowsiness and fatigue. Blood pressure medicines, statins, proton pump inhibitors (PPI), benzodiazepines, antidepressants, and antihistamines may all contribute to excessive sleepiness.

Poor Nutrition: If your loved one's diet consists mainly of processed foods, rather than fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains, it is possible they might have a vitamin deficiency. Being deficient in vitamins D or B can cause fatigue, as can low levels of copper, iron, or magnesium.

Helping Someone With Alzheimer's Disease Overcome Chronic Fatigue

Fortunately, many underlying conditions that may contribute to low energy and chronic fatigue can be treated. Here are a few steps you can take to help a loved one with Alzheimer's disease improve their energy level:

1. Schedule an appointment with their primary care provider. They can determine if there is a medical reason behind your loved one's fatigue, like a nutritional deficiency or thyroid disease. A family physician can also assess them for depression and make treatment recommendations.

If you suspect a medication may be the cause of their fatigue, talk with your loved one's provider to see if there are alternatives available.

2. Adopt a Mediterranean-style diet. Focus on fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, olive oil, lean meats, and fish. Work on reducing or eliminating white flour products, pastries, and sugary drinks.

[This approach will help you](#) improve your aging loved one's nutritional intake while stabilizing their blood sugar.

3. Investigate methods for managing agitation and anxiety. Both conditions often lead to sleepless nights for those with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers. The [Alzheimer's Association Caregiver Center](#) has a variety of information and resources dedicated to improving sleep for individuals with dementia.

4. Create an inviting sleep environment at bedtime. Many people with Alzheimer's wake up more often and stay awake longer at night. Helping them stay active during the day and ease into a bedtime routine at night may help with their quality of sleep. This tip may also help reduce the symptoms of sundowning.

Addressing Wandering Behavior and Wanting to “Go Home”

Anyone who is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or another type of dementia is at risk for wandering. It can occur during any stage of the disease and usually happens when someone feels bored, uneasy, unhappy, lonely, or cannot locate familiar places or objects.

Wandering can occur both indoors and outdoors. Signs include pacing, aimlessly moving around the house, or cues like the person asking to “go home.”

Read on for tips to limit wandering and what to do if it happens.

Why Do People With Dementia Want to “Go Home”?

You may notice your loved one with dementia asking – or trying – to “go home,” even if they are already at home. What does this behavior mean, and how can you address it?

Asking to go home, or other behaviors like packing, can indicate that the person is thinking of their childhood home or another home of their past. In this case, “home” represents not so much a physical location, but a place in time that represented happiness or security. Wanting to go home can also be your loved one's way of expressing their need for calmness or a more structured routine.

Redirecting can be a helpful strategy when someone with dementia wants to go home. You might say, “Mom, I see you've packed up to leave. Why don't I help you unpack and get settled?” Don't try to reason with the person or explain that they are home; simply move their attention on to something else.

You might also try to talk to them about favorite memories from their childhood – perhaps baking or taking walks outdoors – and incorporate them into their daily routine for a sense of comfort.

How to Prevent Wandering Behavior

Knowing what usually triggers wandering can be the key to preventing it. Try to be aware of when and under what circumstances your loved one starts to wander.

You can also try some of the following tips if they're appropriate for your situation. Depending on your loved one, you may need to try more than one strategy before finding what works best for you.

- Keep the person engaged in other activities. Choose things they enjoy and can find purpose in. Helping with light housework, sorting items, or looking at a photo album can all be good choices.
- Ensure your loved one's needs are met. Because communication is more difficult for people with dementia, feeling hungry, thirsty, tired, or needing to use the bathroom can all trigger wandering. In reality, the person simply wants their needs to be met.
- Keep doors locked and car keys hidden. In addition, [The Mayo Clinic](#) advises covering doors with curtains that match the walls, or even taping a sign to a door, to help keep people with dementia from exiting the home. You might consider installing a bell or alarm that rings when a door is opened as an added safety measure.



What to Do If Wandering Happens

Despite your best efforts, your loved one may still wander at some point. Keep in mind that the Alzheimer's Association advises to never search for a missing person for more than 15 minutes by yourself. If you cannot locate your loved one within that time, call 911 for help. Use the following tips to ensure you are prepared to respond as quickly as possible.

- Keep an updated written physical description of your senior loved one. Include their height, weight, eye color, hair color, and any identifying marks or features like a tattoo or scar.
- Have a list of at least three family members or friends who can be emergency contacts if your loved one needs medical intervention when they are found. Include work, home, and cell phone numbers.
- Make sure you have recent photos of your loved one. Keeping hard copies and digital versions of the photos is ideal. It is important that the pictures be of good quality so they can be clearly photocopied for flyers. Be sure to update the photos as your loved one's appearance changes. A few seconds of video showing your loved one's face will also make it easier for the media to alert the public.
- Create a list of places and addresses familiar to your family member. It might give authorities a starting point for their search. Places to include might be adult children's homes, your senior loved one's past residences, former employers, favorite clubs, and their church or synagogue.
- If your aging family member still drives, be sure you have a photo and description of their car including the license plate number, make, model, and year. This will make it easier for law enforcement to alert authorities in surrounding cities and towns to be on the lookout for their vehicle.

Dealing With Delusions, Aggression, and Sundowning

Changes in mood and behavior can be the most puzzling and challenging for dementia caregivers to navigate. For example, your normally quiet mother may snap at you or become agitated more quickly as her Alzheimer's progresses.

Keep in mind that these changes are a result of the disease. Your loved one's actions or words are not a personal attack or result of anything you've done wrong, but simply a behavior they cannot control.

With that in mind, read on to learn more about three common types of behaviors – delusions, aggression, and sundowning – and strategies for dealing with them.



Addressing Delusions in Dementia

Approximately 30 percent of people with dementia experience delusions at some stage of the disease. The Alzheimer's Association defines delusions as rigidly held beliefs that are not true, while paranoia is an unrealistic concern that others are "out to get" the person or cause them harm. Hallucinations are sensory in nature and cause an individual with Alzheimer's disease to see, hear, taste, smell, or feel things that are not real.

Paranoia, delusions, and hallucinations tend to occur in mid- to late-stage dementia. Confusion and memory loss can contribute to these problems as the person struggles to make sense of their world.

If your loved one's paranoia, delusions, or hallucinations are new or increase in severity, discuss them with your loved one's primary care provider.

The same applies if you are concerned that your loved one's delusions may cause them to harm themselves or a caregiver. While medication is usually not the first line of treatment, it may be appropriate in severe cases.

- 1. Don't argue or try to convince.** Allow the person to express their ideas and acknowledge their opinions. Offer reassurance and a gentle touch. Remain calm.
- 2. Turn off the TV.** What may seem like innocent "background noise" to you may provoke fear or confusion for your loved one. Remember that the line between reality and fantasy is often blurred in people with dementia.
- 3. Offer a simple answer.** Don't try to persuade the person with lengthy explanations.
- 4. Look for patterns.** Does the behavior tend to occur at a certain time of day? Keep a log of the person's activities, and look for ways to avoid situations that may trigger paranoia or delusions.
- 5. Distract and redirect.** Try to switch the person's focus to another activity. Ask them to help you with a chore, or point out something of interest.
- 6. Keep extras on hand.** If the person repeatedly loses and searches for a particular item, consider keeping several available. For example, if Dad loses his wallet and thinks it's stolen, buy two or more of the same wallet and have it readily available.

Handling Dementia-Related Aggression

While disconcerting, anger and aggression are common behaviors – affecting one-third of those diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or dementia. Caregivers are often caught off guard by aggressive behaviors, which can be physical or verbal, and appear suddenly without warning or provocation.

Catastrophic reactions are an overreaction to everyday, non-threatening situations. They occur most often during the middle stages of Alzheimer's or dementia, and can cause intense outbursts of screaming, crying, or other aggressive behaviors.

Common causes for anger and aggression in those with dementia include physical discomfort, frustration, and overstimulation. If your loved one has difficulty communicating, it might take some sleuthing to identify what is triggering their behavior. Scheduling an appointment with their primary care provider can help rule out causes related to illnesses or medication side effects.

- 1. Look for the feelings behind the outburst.** Does your loved one appear to be frustrated? Are they grimacing in a way that says they're in pain? Try to get to the underlying issue so you can resolve it. That will likely help reduce or eliminate their aggressive behavior.
- 2. Slowly approach your loved one from the front so they can see you coming.** Stay calm and speak to them in a slow, soft tone. It might be difficult to do when confronted by an angry loved one, but it will help to defuse the situation. Don't respond with agitation or irritation. They can pick up on those emotions, and it will only escalate their feelings.
- 3. Reduce environmental stimulations.** Noise from the television, children running around, and the dog barking can be overwhelming for a person with Alzheimer's. Try to eliminate as many distractions as possible.
- 4. Break tasks down into smaller steps to limit frustration.** Since someone living with dementia may be unable to access the parts of their memory that allow them to complete everyday activities, break the tasks down into more manageable steps. Instead of just telling a senior loved one to "get dressed," for example, guide them through the process.

Tips for Reducing Sundowning Symptoms

Sundown syndrome is a state of confusion affecting people with dementia during the late afternoon and evening hours. In addition to confusion, sundowning can cause anxiety, aggression, and wandering, as well as irritability and sleeplessness. While the causes of sundown syndrome are unclear, it is possible to limit the symptoms.

Seeking medical advice is one of the first steps you should take if symptoms of sundowning appear, change, or worsen. Your loved one's doctor will be able to determine if there is a medical reason for their behavioral changes.

You can also try one of the following strategies to help reduce sundowning episodes:

- **Maintain a predictable routine.** Daily activities that are enjoyable and engrossing for your loved one can help reduce feelings of anxiety, according to the Alzheimer's Association.
- **Turn the lights on.** Shadows can cause confusion and fear in individuals with dementia. Make sure the rooms your loved one uses during the late afternoon and evening have plenty of light – both natural and artificial.
- **Limit alcohol and caffeine.** These beverages can provide too much stimulation for someone with dementia and make it hard for them to settle down at night.
- **Regulate their body clock.** Exposure to natural sunlight helps regulate the body's circadian rhythm – making it easier to feel tired as the evening begins.
- **Create a soothing environment for bedtime.** Getting enough rest can help your loved one feel less anxious. If they have difficulty falling asleep, reduce distractions and loud noises before bedtime. You might also try a white noise machine to create calming sounds or plug in a nightlight to help your loved one feel more comfortable.

Can Essential Oils Help People With Dementia Sleep Better?

The use of essential oils to reduce agitation and sleep disturbances in individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia continues to be an area of interest for researchers.

There is limited research showing that essential oils may help to improve sleep quality for those with dementia. Using the same scent consistently can help your loved one relax as they prepare for sleep and may lessen the symptoms of sundowning.

Some essential oils that have been associated with promoting a better sleep environment include:

- Jasmine
- Lavender
- Marjoram
- Sandalwood

Essential oils can be used in many ways, such as with a diffuser, inhaled, topically (like through massage), and taken through a person's diet. However, the Food and Drug Administration does not regulate essential oils, so talk with your provider before using to prevent potential drug interactions.



Supporting a Loved One With Dementia

Maintaining Independence in People With Dementia: Tips for Caregivers

People in the early stage of dementia may experience impairments in language, memory, insight, and social skills. Changes in their ability to remember, follow instructions, and carry out tasks that used to be routine can become challenging. Adopting coping strategies that address common challenges can enhance your loved one's self-confidence and help them maintain their independence.



What Does a Coping Strategy Look Like?

- Focus on the daily or frequent goals that are most important to your loved one. Be realistic about what they can still do. Make lists of the steps necessary to carry out a task, such as writing checks, shopping for groceries, and so on.
- Encourage your loved one to maintain a daily routine with a written schedule of what they want to accomplish and when. This will ensure important things like taking medication or paying bills aren't forgotten.
- Focus on completing one task at a time, rather than working on multiple things at once. Take breaks if necessary.
- Let them know it's OK to accept help from others. Though it may seem counterintuitive, seeking help actually enhances their independence while also providing a sense of control.

Tips for Staying Organized

Encourage your loved one to keep a notepad or calendar to record everyday tasks, to-dos, and things they want to remember later. Have a bulletin board where you can both post reminders and schedules.



Label things they often use to identify them and show where they are stored. Get a clock that shows the date and day as well as the time. Select one place to store items like keys, glasses, and a wallet, so your loved one can always find them as they go about their day.

Provide them with a personal phone or address book, and be sure that contact information for family, friends, healthcare professionals, and services they use often are all in one place and well-organized. Enter all of their important phone numbers and email addresses into both your phone and theirs.

When it comes to medications, a pillbox is essential. Help your loved one set it up each evening for the next day's dosages. Remind your loved one when to take their next dose and keep track of each medication separately. If your loved one has difficulty remembering to take their medications, consider downloading a medication management app that will send reminders.

Communication Tips for People With Dementia

Due to increasing cognitive dysfunction, people with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia may become withdrawn and socially isolated. Read on to learn how dementia may affect your loved one's communication skills and get tips for communicating more effectively.

How Dementia Can Affect Communication Skills

The [Alzheimer's Association](#) explains that dementia impacts a person's communication skills in a variety of ways. It can affect a person's ability to speak, remember what was said, and understand what they hear from others. Other challenges can include difficulties with writing and reading.

One of the first symptoms you may notice in your loved one is their difficulty finding the right words when speaking. They may describe a familiar object because they cannot recall its name – nouns are the first type of words to be affected. Additionally, your loved one's train of thought might get interrupted, making it difficult for them to finish their sentence.

People with dementia find it difficult to join a conversation, to understand subtlety or a joke, or keep up with complex sentences that include two or more pieces of information. Unable to find the right word, a person may say the wrong word or use a made-up word. As dementia worsens, these mistakes can increase.

Some people try to conceal their communication problems by pretending to understand more than they do when, in fact, they may completely misunderstand the conversation or situation. They may revert to silence, relying more on gestures than speech. The inability to speak coherently can cause people with dementia to feel frustrated and alone.

Dementia and Communication Strategies

Your communication strategies will vary depending on whether your loved one is in the early, middle, or late stage of Alzheimer's disease. You should also consider their preferred communication style – for instance, text messages versus FaceTime chats. Following are some communication tips adapted from the [Alzheimer's Association's website](#) that might be helpful.

Communication Tips – Early Stage of Alzheimer's Disease

- Don't assume how dementia affects your loved one's ability to communicate. Let them ask for assistance (i.e. finding a word, etc.) before jumping in to help.
- Give your loved one plenty of time to respond.
- If in a group setting, don't exclude your loved one from the conversation. While your intention might be to spare them discomfort, you may make them feel more self-conscious, which might cause them to withdraw.

Communication Tips – Middle Stage of Alzheimer's Disease

- Limit distractions, if possible, so your loved one can focus better on what you are saying.
- Speak slowly and ask one question at a time to lower the chances of overwhelming your loved one.
- Keep your questions simple and use gestures if necessary. For instance, you may ask if your mother would like some coffee while pointing to the coffee carafe.

Communication Tips – Late Stage of Alzheimer's Disease

- Use nonverbal communication – pointing or gesturing – to convey what you are trying to say and ask your loved one to do the same.
- Listen to your loved one's tone of voice. Do they sound happy, sad, or scared? More than the words they express, the emotions they share can tell you what they need.

Relaxation Techniques for People With Dementia

Anxiety can affect people with symptoms of dementia, especially in the early stages of the disease. There is a lot that caregivers can do to help calm their loved ones. Not every strategy will work, so patience and a trial-and-error approach is best.

Begin by assessing which factors seem to cause anxiety in your loved one. Your own observations, together with gentle discussions with your loved one, can yield important clues as to how to adjust their environment to reduce levels of anxiety, as well as what relaxation techniques might be the most beneficial.

For example, you might ask:

- Are loud noises especially upsetting?
- Is lack of sleep exacerbating anxiety?
- Is there a particular part of the day's routine, or an activity that is prone to triggering a panic attack?

Breathing Exercises

[Controlled deep breathing](#) is a simple, effective exercise for promoting calmness. It may also be effective in people with dementia.

By fully expanding the diaphragm, deep breathing allows oxygenated air to fill the lungs completely, prompting a relaxation response in the brain. By contrast, shallow “chest breathing” is associated with releasing stress hormones.

There are many [breathing techniques](#), but starting simple is likely the best option for you and your loved one.

In a quiet environment, simply encourage them to inhale slowly and deeply through the nose, causing not only the chest but the belly to expand; hold that position for a second or two, and then slowly exhale through the nose or mouth. Repeat the process for several minutes until they appear to be more relaxed.

Try to make this exercise a regular feature of each day, or whenever it seems necessary. As a caregiver, you may even benefit from practicing controlled breathing yourself.

Listen to Music

Since the areas of the brain that are associated with musical memories are typically less affected by Alzheimer's disease, music can be a powerful tool to help your loved one relax.

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), music can also:

- Reduce stress
- Encourage communication
- Adjust your loved one's mood

Pay attention to the songs which your loved one reacts positively to and play them regularly.



Make Things Accessible

Not being able to locate commonly used objects can be an extra source of anxiety or even panic for your loved one.

Keep their possessions, such as grooming, hygiene, and clothing items needed each day, well organized and within easy reach. If it seems advisable, go over their locations frequently.

Taking Care of Yourself as a Dementia Caregiver

Caregiving is a full-time job that brings physical, mental, and emotional challenges. You may be struggling to juggle an already-full schedule, worried by the changes in your loved one's abilities or behavior, or simply feeling overwhelmed.

Remember that in order to provide the best care for your loved one, you need to take care of yourself. A solid self-care routine is essential for maintaining your energy levels and preventing burnout.

Try the following tips to focus on your own health and well-being throughout your day.

- **Listen to your body.** Stress and burnout are real possibilities when caregiving. Know when you're reaching your limit and recognize that it's OK to ask for help.
- **Let go of perfection.** You don't need to do everything perfectly to be a good caregiver. Doing your best is all anyone can expect of you.
- **Eat regular, healthy meals.** Skipping meals or relying on less-nutritious choices won't give you the energy you need to make it through the day. Consider a meal-delivery service or look for healthy pre-made options to save you time.
- **Get exercise when you can.** Even short bouts of exercise can boost your mood and energy levels. Natural light is an added bonus, so try a short walk around the block or a trip to the backyard with your loved one.
- **Try to get enough sleep.** This one can be tough if you're awake at night caring for your loved one. Do your best to stick to a regular bedtime and waking schedule and see if others in the household would be able to take on some nighttime duties.

As a caregiver, you'll likely also experience a range of emotions, including guilt, frustration, numbness, and more. These are all normal and expected. You might try sharing these feelings with a nonjudgmental friend, or you may want to see a therapist. You can also look for a memory care support group in your area where you can meet with other dementia caregivers who understand what you are going through and can offer support.

What to Know About Memory Care Communities

In this section we will explore what you can expect in a memory care community, how to know if your loved one needs a memory care community, and what to look for when evaluating different memory care communities.

When It's Time for Memory Care

As your loved one's disease progresses, you may find yourself unable to meet their needs. Memory care is similar to assisted living, but with specific support for people who have dementia or other cognitive impairments.

Many assisted living communities also offer memory care within a secure setting that has been designed to address the special needs of those living with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia. Staff members receive extensive training to work with people who have dementia and care for their specific needs.

When deciding if memory care is appropriate for your loved one, it can be helpful to consider these questions offered by the Alzheimer's Association:

- Is the person with dementia becoming unsafe in their current home?
- Is the health of the person with dementia (or the caregiver's health) at risk?
- Do the person's care needs extend beyond the caregiver's emotional and/or physical abilities?
- Would the structure and social interaction provided at a memory care community benefit the person with dementia?

Costs depend on the level of care needed, the size of the apartment, whether it's private or shared, and the community's geographical location.

How to Choose a Memory Care Community

In considering whether memory care can meet your loved one's needs, there are three major considerations: how good is the quality of the care, how robust is the activity program, and finally, how well-laid-out and maintained is the community?

Here are some things to consider when touring a prospective community:

- Is the community responsive to family requests, and do they allow family members to visit at any time?
- Does the community resemble a home or a nice hotel? Do residents actually use common areas?
- How does the staff interact with you and with the residents? Are they friendly? Do they seem to know the residents well?
- Is the calendar of activities varied and aimed at meeting the residents' social, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs? Is there arts programming? Do skilled activity coordinators lead activities?
- What training has the staff received? An ongoing training program is important to ensure that staff is current on the best practices for care.
- What are the rooms or apartments like? Is the dining area pleasant? Check out the bathrooms and the apartment where the person will live to evaluate whether the privacy needs of the individual will be met.

Is the building well-maintained, with rooms and furniture that are clean, odor-free, and in good repair? During a tour, make notes regarding the above situations. This way, you can always refer back to them and refresh your memory when it comes time to make a decision. Ask questions and expect good answers in return.

Transitioning a loved one to a memory care community can be stressful and emotional, but bear in mind that gathering good information in advance can relieve some of the worries and help maximize the chance of making the best decision.

Regardless of what setting you choose, it should be a priority that your loved one receives the care they really need in a safe and supportive environment.

Reflections at The Bristol

Each community at The Bristol has a private memory care neighborhood called Reflections, where our top priority is the safety, security, and comfort of residents.

Features include:

- Memory care areas are electronic keypad-protected, which helps maintain consistent and familiar surroundings for residents.
- Pull cords are available in all bathrooms, bedrooms, and showers, and staff is alerted immediately when pulled.
- Bright, natural lighting and consistent floor coverings help residents find their way.
- Individual care plans for each resident ensure staff members get to know them closely and help them transition to their new home as smoothly as possible.
- Cutting-edge technology that can help track a resident's health, predict an elevated risk of falling, and provide immediate alerts should a fall occur (select communities).

Kate Schneider is a Certified Dementia Practitioner and the programming specialist for Reflections. She is responsible for developing and implementing therapeutic programming for memory care residents and helps to ensure that they experience consistent and safe surroundings.

Kate also trains team members who work in Reflections, so they can better understand the cognitive, physical, and emotional challenges people with Alzheimer's disease face, which allows them to provide competent, compassionate care.

If Reflections sounds like it might be a good solution for your loved one, you are invited to schedule a visit where you will experience our person-centered approach firsthand.

[Schedule My Visit](#)