

# Memory loss & dementia

A Jewish Care Interact Guide

## Memory loss and dementia

Memory loss is one of the symptoms most commonly linked with dementia—a condition or set of symptoms that also includes mood changes and issues with communication and reasoning. But becoming forgetful does not necessarily mean someone has dementia. Memory loss can be an effect of ageing, but it can also be a sign of stress, depression or medical conditions like vitamin deficiencies or other brain related illnesses.

According to the Alzheimer's Society, there are 800,000 people with dementia in the UK. While most commonly associated with older people, dementia and its symptoms can affect younger people too. Most forms of dementia can't be cured, but with an early diagnosis, a healthy general lifestyle and a solid caring network, you can continue to share positive experiences and enjoy yourself. At Jewish Care Interact, we've collected some resources that can help you and your carers plan for the future.

When it comes to communication, a positive memory from the past may be a useful link to connect the conversation to the present.

Remaining active, social and engaged is key to helping someone with dementia to feel positive and motivated. Additionally, technology can play a huge part in living independently and safely; it can also give considerable comfort to—and reduce the concerns of—friends, family and carers.

There are more than 100 different types of dementia. Some are better understood than others.

Patience and a good sense of humour will help during this transition in life, so along with good general health, a strong social and support network will be vital when it comes to facing memory loss or dementia.

This booklet can help to provide some groundwork to help you build the network you need in order to face memory loss and dementia.

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### Memory loss and dementia: at home

If you worry that memory is becoming a challenge for you or someone you care for, you should probably discuss those concerns with a GP. This is especially true if short-term memories are fleeting or it's hard to recall conversations that happened earlier in the same day.

#### Getting your message across

For people with memory loss or dementia, eye contact, a friendly smile and a calming tone can be the key to rewarding conversation. Quieter, more familiar locations with fewer distractions may be helpful too. Body language and gestures can spark memories and express ideas, so just be patient and reinforce words with meaningful, gentle actions. Sometimes a reassuring form of physical contact, if welcome, can add to the conversation.

Try to use words that are familiar. Slang may be hip, but in this case, it might not be all that helpful.

Set the pace and direct the conversation on realistic terms. Expect lots of questions, and don't worry if you're asked to repeat what was said. You aren't being ignored. And unless there is an emergency, take your time to communicate with someone who has memory loss or dementia. It's perfectly fine

to slow the conversation down.

If you're finding it difficult to relay your message, reminiscence might be helpful. There are many guides that can help you make it easier to communicate. Here is a brief list.

- [How to help someone with dementia feel understood \(information from Unforgettable.org\)](#)
- [Communicating \(a guide from The Alzheimer's Society\)](#)
- [Tips for better communication with a person with dementia \(a downloadable PDF from Dementia UK\)](#)
- [Communicating with people with dementia \(from the NHS\)](#)

### Using the telephone

Using the telephone can be a great way to stay in touch. Fortunately, there are special accessories that can help people with memory loss use standard telephones and mobile phones.

**Regular phones.** Mobile number, office number, home number...many people have a few phone numbers, so it becomes a bit trickier to keep track. To make things easier, there are some telephones that can be set up with photographs and programmed with favourite or frequently dialled numbers. With the push of just one button, direct contact can be made with a doctor, family member, friend, carer, chemist or emergency services.

Some of these phones feature regular dial options in addition to the photo buttons. Big button number phones are another helpful option.

When incoming calls are the most important priority, phones without dials or buttons may be a good idea. These dial-less phones are a great way to maintain safe contact since they preserve direct communication, but they remove the possibility of unwanted or random outgoing calls. Keep in mind that there needs to be at least one other outgoing call option on the premises—whether it be a mobile phone or another calling device.

**Mobile phones.** There are many mobile phones available, but when memory loss is a decision-making factor, then simplicity is key. As with picture phones, some mobile phones can be automatically programmed so all it takes is the push of one button to get the right call placed.

Customised ringtones can also be helpful, especially if an appropriate pre-recorded message can be associated with each incoming phone call. For instance, if you mum has memory loss and frequently leaves the landline off the hook, just create a custom ringtone with your voice telling her to hang up the landline properly and then call you back.

Many mobile phones also have global positioning systems (GPS), which are handy if the device is misplaced or the person using the phone becomes lost or disorientated. Speakerphones on smart devices can also be useful since this feature can help make the phone louder.

### Personal care

For many people, daily routine is fairly predictable part of the morning. You get up, shower, eat

breakfast, get dressed and start the day.

And while routine is helpful for people living with memory loss and dementia, these kinds of humdrum activities may or may not be popular. Instead, picking out an outfit might seem confusing and challenging while taking a hot bath could seem frightening—even if there is absolutely no danger.

Sticking to a basic personal care routine may take a bit more time for someone with memory loss or dementia, but maintaining a positive outward appearance can help raise that person's self-esteem. It can also preserve general good health and wellbeing by minimising the chance of infections.

### Daily washing

When it comes to personal hygiene, try not to force the issue in terms of bathing, brushing teeth, shaving and other daily activities. If mouthwash is too strong or becomes too difficult to use for someone with memory loss, try introducing chamomile or peppermint tea as another way to freshen breath. Instead of making these tasks stressful, make them enjoyable and relaxing, whether someone can handle these activities alone or if assistance is needed.

Privacy and dignity should be respected at all times; safety is incredibly important as well. Handrails can be installed near the toilet and tub or shower, and anti-slip mats should be safely used in the bath.

Make sure the bathroom is warm and the soap, shampoo and other toiletries are favourite brands with familiar smells. Keep choices to a minimum, just to avoid confusion.

[The Alzheimer Society has some additional advice on washing and bathing](#); the organisation also has a [factsheet with tips on how to manage toilet problems and incontinence](#). And the [NHS has information on personal hygiene for cared-for people](#).

### Getting dressed

Sometimes it feels like you have a wardrobe full of nothing to wear, doesn't it? Well put yourself in the place of someone with memory loss or dementia, and then think about what it must be like to get dressed every day.

To make this task easier, try introducing visual tools. Use pictures or words—or both—to identify where different items of clothing are kept. It might be wise to clear out drawers and wardrobes so they only contain favourite (or seasonally appropriate) items of clothing.

If a pair of socks (or shoes, or trousers, or underwear...anything!) is popular, then make sure there is more than just the one pair. If something is clean, comfortable, and well liked, then that will add to its appeal.

Can you stick with a few preferred colours? Snaps instead of buttons? Velcro instead of zippers? Being practical about clothing will make things less confusing for someone with memory loss or dementia. Soft fabrics that are easy to wash and require no ironing are ideal. Shoes must be comfortable and should have non-slip soles.

When picking out an outfit for the day, try to present no more than two options; this allows for freedom of choice, but it doesn't create an overwhelming situation. So what if the outfit doesn't match—it doesn't matter as long as it isn't dangerous or inappropriate.

[The NHS web page, Caring for someone with dementia from home](#), is a good resource for basic information on dressing and other personal care subjects. [The Alzheimer's Society website also has a page dedicated to the topic of dressing.](#)

### **Cooking and nutrition**

As with most things associated with memory loss and dementia, a routine is an important part of the discussion about food and nutrition. Some of the same ideas that work well in other parts of the daily routine can be helpful in the kitchen too.

### **Let's get cooking!**

If someone enjoys cooking as a creative outlet and a form of independence, then memory loss or dementia doesn't have to end that pleasure. It might just mean making some modifications to the kitchen, so cooking projects are safe and easy.

According to research by Suzanne Fitzsimmons and Linda Buettner, cooking can be a helpful form of therapy for people with dementia. In the [report entitled, A therapeutic cooking program for older adults with dementia: Effects on agitation and apathy](#), Fitzsimmons and Buettner explain, "Food—and the act of cooking— have powerful meaning to older adults. Food defines culture, family history, and traditions".

The article then continues with an explanation of research conducted by the pair in a residential care home that specialised in dementia: "Cooking provides the opportunity to take pride in oneself and perform past roles. Providing individuals with cooking opportunities increases socialisation as preparing and eating foods is the most social of all activities of daily living (ADLs) and is the glue of our social system".

So to keep the cooking experience safe and enjoyable, think about adding labels and signs to help organise the pantry. If the top shelf of a closet or cupboard is too high for safe and easy access, take the useful items out and put them in a place that's within reach. The [Alzheimer Society has some good information on its page that covers Safety in the home](#); for more kitchen pointers, make sure to scroll down to the section that explains adaptations to the home.

### **Food for thought**

For many people, it's hard to imagine what it would be like to lose interest in food—especially for someone who has always had a healthy appetite. But when it comes to memory loss or dementia, loss of appetite can happen to anyone. However, good nutrition is essential when it comes to wellbeing.

Some people with memory loss may develop a taste for a type of food that has never been a favourite; others come up with their own creative food combinations—whatever works is fine!

And food preferences may change from day to day or month to month. Flexibility is essential in order to keep the experience positive for everyone.

Finger foods can be helpful if using a knife and fork becomes a challenge; fresh fruits and vegetables can be cut up into snack-sized portions to encourage healthy and independent eating habits. However, if swallowing becomes difficult, there are other ways to get the best nutritional balance.

Smoothies are an excellent way to create tasty snacks and meals with great health benefits. And since staying hydrated is really important for people with memory loss or dementia, liquids in the form of smoothies can serve several purposes. Still, water is even more important when it comes to the basics of staying hydrated: six to eight cups of liquid a day is ideal.

Here are some good resources for more tips on dealing with dementia and diet:

- [Eating and drinking](#), from the Alzheimer's Society
- [Dementia and nutrition](#), from CarersUK.org
- [Looking after someone with dementia](#), from NHS (see the health and nutrition section)
- [Dementia and food](#), a downloadable PDF from Norfolk NHS

### Around the house

For people with memory loss or dementia, home decor is more than just a matter of personal taste, it's also a matter of comfort and safety. From lighting to flooring, the right environment can make a big difference.

**Good lighting.** When poor eyesight combines with dementia or memory loss, the right kind of lighting can help brighten up the environment and reduce the chance of falls. Switches should be easy to use, especially around stairways and in toilets. And night lights are a good idea as well. Letting natural sunshine come in can do more than just make the space brighter—it can add warmth and bring positive energy into a room. But remember to beware of glare and confusing shadows when giving a room a light makeover.

**Colour my world.** When dealing with accents like doors, bannisters, handrails and toilet seats, stick with bold, solid colours. Warm tones on walls are ideal; avoid mirrors or wallpaper with abstract patterns or pastel tones. In general, bright colours can help create visual memory hooks for furniture too, so a favourite chair will stand out and be easy to find—especially if the colour of the chair is in bold contrast to the carpet.

**Sounds about right.** Carpets should be neutral in colour and patterns should not be confusing in any way. Hard, shiny floors should be avoided, and throw rugs should be thrown...away! And if someone with memory loss also experiences hearing loss, then soft furniture and carpeting can make a huge difference when it comes to cutting down background noise.

For more information on safety and dementia in the home, you can check out the following links for more ideas on home decor:

- [Safety in the home](#), from the Alzheimer's Society
- [Home environment and dementia](#), from NHS Choices
- [Dementia friendly environments](#), from Care UK
- [Caring for someone with dementia](#), a PDF download from Age UK
- [Equipment to help with caring](#), from Carers UK
- [Dementia friendly physical environment checklist](#), a downloadable PDF from Dementia Action Alliance and Innovations in Dementia

### Home adaptations

Making adjustments to your home to make living with dementia and memory loss can prove costly. In the UK, local councils may provide grants for home adaptations, and this varies from council to council. For guidance on how to find out about how your local council can help with home improvements, read about [Equipment and changes to your home from Carers UK](#).

And to find out about [financial assistance and dementia related home adaptations](#), please visit the [Housing Executive website](#).

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### Memory loss and dementia: at work

People who experience memory loss or dementia early in life may initially think it will be difficult to keep up with their careers. But as a result of the Equality Act 2010, this doesn't have to be the case. Dementia does not immediately mean the end of professional life; however, it does mean employers must be prepared to provide suitable accommodations to support this major life adjustment.

### Looking for work

In the UK, Jobcentre Plus is the main provider of support for disabled people looking for work. Within each Jobcentre is a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA), who can help you;

- Find a job;
- Find job-related training;
- Find disability friendly employers; and
- Refer you to a work psychologist, if appropriate.

### Work Choice

Your DEA can also advise you on programmes to help you get into work, which include Work Choice—a government supported employment programme built specifically to help you find a job, and offers support when you start work. It includes:

- Training and help in developing your skills;
- Support in building your confidence; and
- Interview coaching.

The level of assistance provided depends on what you need and varies from person to person; find out more about the details associated with assistance from the [Work Choice section of the GOV.UK website](#).

## Specialist Employability Support

Specialist Employability Support provides mentoring and training to disabled people who do not qualify for other government schemes like Work Choice. To receive Specialist Employability Support, you must have a disability or health condition, be unemployed and of working age.

Depending on your needs, two types of support are available:

- Short-term support and training which typically lasts for around three months; and
- Long-term help usually lasting for 12 months.

You are allowed to choose the organisation that supports you, whether it is your local Jobcentre Plus or a specialist disability employment agency.

[Check out the Specialist Employability Support section of GOV.UK to find out more about the scheme.](#)

## Two Ticks

When looking for work, remember to search out Two Ticks—the “positive about disabled people” symbol—on vacancy lists and ads in England, Scotland and Wales. (Note: the symbol is not used in Northern Ireland.)

This Jobcentre Plus programme supports employers who wish to hire disabled people. These employers must:

- Interview all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and consider them on their abilities;
- Discuss with disabled employees, at any time but at least once a year, what you can both do to make sure employees can develop and use their abilities;
- Make every effort when employees become disabled to make sure they stay in employment;
- Take action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness needed to make these commitments work; and
- Review these commitments every year and assess what has been achieved, plan ways to improve on them and let employees and Jobcentre Plus know about progress and future plans.

## Disclosing your disability

Looking for work can be difficult, and some potential employers might seem dismissive of you if you have memory loss or dementia. But remember, it’s against the law for employers to discriminate against you because of a disability. However, your potential employer may ask if you have a health condition or disability on an application form or in an interview; whether or not you disclose your disability is entirely up to you.

If driving is part of the job requirement, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) must be made aware of your condition. The GOV.UK website has a guide that explains how to [let the DVLA know about memory loss or dementia conditions](#). You will have to share this information with your automobile insurance company too.



If you do decide to make your potential employer aware of your memory loss, you would be entitled to “reasonable adjustments” during the interview. To find out more about adjustments during an interview, visit the [Disability rights section of the GOV.UK website](#).

### **In the workplace**

When you are in work, your employer needs to make whatever “reasonable adjustments” are necessary to ensure that you are on par with your non-disabled peers in the workplace. These may include:

- Purchasing equipment that can help with duties and tasks;
- Incorporating a sufficient degree of flexibility into deadlines;
- Making changes to the work environment; and
- Adjusting working hours and job responsibilities.

[The Alzheimer’s Society has a helpful PDF on Employment; it is free to download from the Working section of the organisation’s site.](#)

### **Access to Work**

Access to Work is a grant programme run by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This government funded initiative has been set up to provide practical advice and financial support for disabled people who are employed, self-employed or about to start a job. Access to Work is designed to support disabled people to help them:

- Start working;
- Stay in work; and
- Become self-employed or start a business.

Jobs can be part-time, full-time, temporary or permanent and coverage has recently been extended to include traineeships, supported internships, work trials and work academies.

The scheme helps you overcome disability barriers by helping to pay for work related costs such as special aids or adaptations you might need at work, a support worker to help you do your job or help with travel if you have difficulties using public transport.

Grants are for practical support that is over and above employers’ legal requirements to make reasonable adjustments. Access to Work grants are tailored to meet individual needs and are not means tested, so they don’t need to be paid back and don’t affect other benefits.

[Access to Work grants provide funds towards the costs of equipment or travel to work;](#) and for additional [information about eligibility, visit Disability Grants website and go to the Access to Work section.](#)

### **Employment support for people with memory loss or dementia**

If you lose your job or are about to lose your job, your memory loss should not be a factor. The [Unforgettable.org website has a helpful guide with pointers that can help you keep your job and](#)

[talk about your dementia with your employer](#). And the [Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project \(DEEP\)](#) has a [downloadable PDF with tips for employers who want to be more dementia friendly](#). Young Dementia UK also has a section dedicated to [Working - advice for employers](#).

### Redundancy

Before employers consider redundancy, they should go through a consultation process and take reasonable steps to include you. An employer cannot select someone for redundancy simply because of a disability. They must go through a fair and balanced process that does not put you at a disadvantage because of your memory loss.

To find out more, please visit the [Redundancy section of the GOV.UK website](#).

### Retirement

In the same way that employers cannot select you for redundancy due to your disability, they are unable to ask you to retire before you are legally required to do so. But if you do decide to retire early, there are ways to protect your state pension and your company pension plan—if you have one.

For information on [how to protect your state pension, visit the Department for Work and Pensions and look for details of your local office](#). You can [contact an independent financial advisor to discuss your company pension plan by visiting UnbiasedUK](#). And to find out about planning for your retirement, please visit the [Plan your retirement income section of the GOV.UK website](#).

### Dismissal

Your employer is unable to dismiss you for reasons related to your disability.

To find out more about being dismissed from your job, please visit the [Dismissal: your rights section of the GOV.UK website](#).

### Know your rights

Under the Equalities Act 2010, employees and job seekers with disabilities are legally protected against discrimination. From the initial recruitment process to promotion and pay along with accessibility in the workplace, it is vital that you are clear on your position and cover.

For more information about your rights, please check out the [Disability discrimination section on the ACAS website](#) or the [Disability Discrimination section of the WorkSmart.org website](#). For official information and [details about the Equality Act 2010, visit the Disability rights section of the GOV.UK website](#).

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## Memory loss and dementia: technology

People living with memory loss and dementia can benefit from all sorts of different types of technology—from mainstream technologies designed for all to use, such as iPods for listening to

music, to assistive technologies designed specifically to support people with memory loss and dementia.

Technology for people with memory loss and dementia can be used for:

- Social engagement and activities with friends, family and carers;
- Easing frustration and managing behaviours without recourse to medication;
- Creating a safe and secure environment;
- Monitoring from a distance in a non-intrusive way;
- Increasing independence in everyday living; and
- Making communication easier.

### **Social engagement and activities**

Due to the nature of memory loss and dementia, focus tends to be on activities done with another person (or other people) and activities that are supported by another person. Technology can play a key role in aiding memory and general enjoyment. Web sites and apps provide digital alternatives to all manner of offline activities, including:

- Reminiscence
- Puzzles;
- Board games;
- Sensory games;
- Drawing;
- Viewing and editing photos; and
- Listening to music.

If you want to learn more about information and communication technology (ICT), check out the ["Using ICT in activities for people with dementia" section of the Social Care Institute for Excellence \(SCIE\) website.](#)

### **Easing frustration and managing behaviours**

Technology for behavioural management can be used for improving attention span, restlessness and impulsiveness, as well as reducing anxiety and agitation.

This sort of technology currently focuses on multi-sensory activities. Some activities offer complete immersion into a physical space. These activities include:

- Immersive spaces; and
- Sensory rooms.

Other activities include the use of multi-sensory tools, toys or devices, such as:

- Vibrating tubes;

- Fibre optic string lights;
- Solar effects projectors;
- Aroma diffusers; and
- Plasma balls.

### **Safety and security**

Technology that ensures people with memory loss and dementia remain safe and secure is essential in supporting them to live as independently as possible. As this sort of technology has evolved, it has also become less intrusive.

Although concerns have been raised around the ethics of this type of technology, when it is used appropriately, it can be hugely beneficial to the person with memory loss or dementia as well as their friends, family and carers.

Safety and security technology includes detection devices, such as:

- Flood detectors;
- Carbon monoxide detectors;
- Temperature detectors;
- Fire detectors; and
- Smoke detectors.

They also include sensors, such as:

- Motion sensors;
- Door and exit sensors;
- Bed occupancy sensors; and
- Window sensors.

In addition to these, mainstream devices can also be helpful, such as:

- Door security bars; and
- Touchpad key locks.

### **Monitoring**

As many people with memory loss and dementia can become easily disorientated and prone to wandering or getting lost, unobtrusive monitoring technology can make a huge difference to overall wellbeing as well as giving enormous comfort to friends, family and carers.

Monitoring technology includes:

- Location devices;
- GPS tracking devices;
- Wearable ID devices; and
- Wearable alarms.

## Everyday living

Memory loss and dementia can have an impact on many aspects of daily living, particularly when it comes to remembering to do certain tasks at certain times and making these tasks simpler.

The technologies used for these purposes may not be all that complex, but they are incredibly helpful. These devices include:

- Medication reminders;
- Medication organisers;
- Electronic calendars with task reminders;
- Orientation clocks;
- Automatic temperature controls;
- Lamp and light activation controls;
- Automated appliances, such as ovens, dishwashers and washing machines;
- Automatic window and curtain controls;
- Garden sensors for automated watering; and
- Electronic showers, taps and toilets.

## Communication

Many people with memory loss and dementia experience social isolation, so ensuring that they can communicate with friends and family, as well as being able to participate in family events and festivals, is vital. For general communication, mainstream technology is used by most, as follows:

- Email for written communication; and
- Online voice or video calling, such as Skype and FaceTime, for verbal or virtual face-to-face communication.

For those who are unable to attend synagogue services, many synagogues are now streaming their services so that people who are unable to attend can listen to them online. Check with your synagogue to find out if they offer this service.

To help with one-to-one communication, the use of Adaptive and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools can be very helpful. If you want [to explore the different types of AAC apps, have a look at the "Free or Lite Versions of AAC Apps" of the Practical AAC website.](#)

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## Memory loss and dementia: out and about

Living with memory loss can have an emotional, social, psychological and practical impact. Often, as mental abilities decline, a person can feel a degree of vulnerability, lack a sense of purpose or question self-worth. Carers, family and friends need to do everything they can to help the person realise their potential, build on self-esteem and retain their sense of identity and dignity.

## Travel and adventure

In the earlier stages of dementia, individuals may still enjoy travel. So to start us off, we have compiled a list of useful resources to help keep travel fun.

[Dementia Adventure](#) offers outings and short breaks. Specialising in trips for people with dementia, their partners, family/friends and carers, Dementia Adventure organises weeks away to the Isle Of Wight, Devon, Suffolk and the Lake District or shorter day trips for sailing or walking. All travel, tickets, accommodation and itineraries are pre-arranged. Also, you will receive support during your trip with a Dementia Adventure team member who can provide as much or as little help throughout your stay to make sure everything runs smoothly.

An alternative, check out [Revitalise](#), a national charity that provides respite care in a holiday setting. With three accessible holiday centres in Chigwell, Southampton and Southport, and a wide range of activities from fitness, museums, theatre and art, Revitalise gives you the chance to meet new people and relax in a fully accessible setting.

If you would rather organise your holiday independently, check out the [Alzheimer's Society's Travelling and going on holiday fact sheet](#) for some advice about planning a holiday for people living with dementia. Giving an overview of the various transport options, sources of financial assistance and travel insurance, this is an absolute must read.

### Accommodation

Here are some key points to consider before booking a trip.

**Are you visiting friends or relatives?** If you are going to stay with them, consider discussing your situation so all involved are clear and aware of the condition. In doing this, each person can provide extra help where needed and jobs can be carefully carved out to ensure a smooth and organised stay.

**Are you staying in a hotel or b&b?** Try to find accommodation that looks user-friendly and welcoming. Ideally, it is preferable to pick a place with fewer corridors to avoid confusion. Be sure to tell staff about your position, so they are on board in case any difficulties occur.

Are you considering a package holiday? If you prefer to use package holiday bookings, make sure you share all relevant details with the travel agency and holiday company prior to booking to ensure all needs are met.

**What type of holiday are you planning?** Check out the location of your destination, making sure there are interesting places to see and things to do. Visiting a familiar place is always a better option.

**How many of you are going away?** Remember, people with dementia might need extra support in a new environment. Consider bringing an additional person to help with adjustments to their routine.

There may come a time when travelling is too disorienting or stressful for the person with dementia, so remember to pick the holiday option that provides the most comfort and the least anxiety. Try choosing destinations that involve as little change to the daily routine as possible. It is a good idea to visit places that were familiar before the onset of dementia, on the chance you can

revive fond memories from the past and create new ones for the future.

### Planning a worry-free trip

Our first tip is this—travel at quieter times if possible, and try to avoid peak seasons and weekends. Travelling can be stressful at the best of times, but if you or your travel companion live with dementia, airports and stations can be very confusing. Changes in environment can result in the person living with dementia walking away. If you are travelling with someone with dementia, make a mental note of their clothing and perhaps carry a photo of them in case you lose touch with them.

Be sure to bring a bag of essentials with you at all times. This should include medications, travel itinerary, a comfortable change of clothes, water, snacks and activities for both you and the person with dementia.

Remember to pack up-to-date medical information (doctor's name and contact information, current medications and dosages and drug allergies) and a complete list of emergency contacts. You may also want to bring photocopies (or make electronic scans) of important legal documents (insurance information, copies of papers like legal will, power of attorney, etc.). Make sure you give your emergency contacts at home a copy of your itinerary; that way they will know where you should be at all times.

### Air travel

Try to avoid booking flights that require tight connections.

Make sure you let the airline know about your needs so they can help you. Most airlines will work with you to accommodate special needs.

If appropriate, tell airport employees and in-flight crew members that you are travelling with someone who has dementia.

Consider requesting a wheelchair, even if walking is not a problem.

Allow for extra time.

### Train travel

With at least two days' notice, rail companies can arrange an escort to help you with your journey. See the [Information for disabled passengers page on the National Rail website](#).

Eurostar also provides a complimentary assistance service, but again, make sure you book at least 48 hours before the journey. Visit the [Special travel needs page on the Eurostar website](#) for more information.

### Car travel

Avoid driving for more than two hours before taking a break.

Listen to traffic updates before you leave.

If you are planning to stop at a motorway service station, remember these areas can be sprawling complexes, which means it can be easy to get lost.

Be sure to give a copy of your phone number and vehicle details (registration number, model and colour) to the person with dementia in case they get lost.

### Using public transport in London

Getting around in London by car is one thing, but using public transport is another. The good news is that there are many resources to help you tame the Tube and beat the buses.

### Transport for London

In addition to all of the traditional services offered through the Transport for London (TfL) website, there is an entire section [devoted to transport accessibility](#). For instance, did you know you could request staff assistance at all Tube, TfL Rail, Overground stations, boats, the Emirates Air Line and Victoria Coach Stations? You can get assistance from drivers on trams and buses (on DLR trains, look for a Passenger Service Agent).

[TfL also offers a travel support card that you can download](#) and use in order to let people know what assistance you may need. And for information on fares, visit the [60+ London Oystercard section of the TfL website](#).

### Transport for All

[Transport for All \(TfA\)](#) is an organisation that is working to make it just as easy for you to travel on public transport as it is for anyone else. Formerly Dial-A-Ride and Taxicard users (DaRT), TfA is a great place to find how public transport is becoming more accessible to everyone, and it covers:

- Underground
- Buses
- Trains
- DLR
- Tramlink
- Riverboats
- The Emirate Airline (Cable Car)
- Airports

TfA also has information on getting travel training or mentoring and tracking down items that have been lost on London's transport system.

In terms of door to door services, TfA can help you research the following:

- Dial-a-Ride
- Capital Call
- Community transport



- Patient transport
- Taxicard
- Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle

The organisation can also help you explore the following concessionary services:

- Blue Badge
- Freedom Pass
- Disabled and Older Persons Railcard
- National Express Coachcard
- 60+ Oystercard

### Freedom Pass

To find out specifically about Freedom Passes, visit the [London Councils Freedom Pass website](#).

### Entertainment, culture and leisure

Going out and engaging in activities outside the home is an important part of everyday life—from local memory cafés to singing groups or other activities. Of course, the extent to which the person's dementia has an impact on their day-to-day life will determine the activity that is most suitable.

### Memory cafés

Memory cafés have been set up across the UK for people with dementia and their carers to meet up, socialise and share their experiences. Providing a safe, comfortable and supportive environment as well as offering fun and engaging activities, memory cafés give people a chance to connect with others, form new friendships and reduce isolation for whole families.

### Music groups and concerts

A key feature of dementia care, singing can improve the quality of life of people with memory loss. Not only does it help with confidence and self-esteem, but the power of music has helped unlock memories that might not otherwise be accessed.

With many sessions taking place across the country in community buildings, [Singing for the Brain \(organised by the Alzheimer's Society\)](#) is free and open to anyone diagnosed with dementia. The session first starts with warm-up exercises (which might include some physical movement (like rolling a beanbag up and down the leg) and continues with singing. Sometimes percussion instruments are included as well. To find a group near you, call the Alzheimer's Society on 0300 222 1122. If there is no Singing for the Brain session in your area, you can ask your GP, local authority or charities such as [Age UK](#) whether they know of any local singing groups.

Another great musical opportunity includes [The Silver Song Clubs, arranged by the organisation, Sing for your Life](#). Taking place in community centres and day clubs, sessions include singing, movement and percussion.

If music doesn't float your boat, how about the arts? Check out [Arts 4 Dementia](#), a young charity set up to develop high quality events at art venues. Weekly activities cover art, design, music, dance, poetry, drama, film and photography.

In London, the [Dulwich Picture Gallery](#) also holds special events for visitors with dementia.

### More activities and ideas

Many restaurants and cafes are dementia friendly. When you arrive, let staff know your situation to see whether they can give you a table in a quieter area or prioritise your order (or clear your plates quicker)!

Perhaps visit your friend or family member's past job. Be mindful that this place may have changed, so you might want to explore before you make the visit. Also, keep in mind that loud noises and modern technology might add to stress levels for someone with dementia.

Check out local learning venues like museums and galleries. Pick quieter places so you can approach and walk through at your own pace. Remember, dementia can influence concentration, so it is worth doing activities in short bursts.

Enjoy a traditional afternoon tea. Garden centres, historic homes and local hotels are all quiet places that lay on afternoon teas that you can enjoy together. Visit your local tourist office for more information or check out the [English Heritage](#) website to find some fun places to explore and have afternoon tea.

Have a look online for a local sensory garden in your area. These gardens are specially designed to provide visitors with different sensory experiences, with scented and edible plants, sculptures, water features and winding walkways.

Keep an eye and ear out for local reminiscence shows.

Here's one final bit of advice. Before you go anywhere, do a recce! It is always worth checking out a venue ahead of your visit. Look out for disabled parking close to the entrance, accessible toilets, accessible footpaths and suitable cafes and restaurants.

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## Memory loss and dementia: grants and benefits

As someone living with or supporting a person with memory loss or dementia in the UK, you may have access to certain state benefits and/or other grants. Here is a list of websites which can help you find out how to claim the benefits available to you.

[Age UK](#). While Age UK is always a good source for general information on ageing, it also has an extremely helpful explanation of Benefits and Entitlements that explains each benefit.

[Alzheimer's Society](#). This site has information that looks at paying for things like housing and retirement along with care and support.

[Alzheimer Scotland](#). The Money and legal issues section of the site breaks down financial matters

and includes some helpful guides.

[Citizens Advice](#). This site offers a comprehensive explanation of different relevant benefits and includes links to calculators and other practical tools.

[Citizens Advice Scotland](#). For residents of Scotland, this site is helpful if you want to gather information on all kinds of benefits.

[DementiaUK](#). Providing an A to Z guide, this page looks at options to help you find out about your benefits and explains different types of financial help that you can get for dementia care.

[GOV.UK](#). The carers and disability benefits section of the GOV.UK site provides comprehensive and reliable information regarding state benefits.

[NHS](#). If you want an in depth overview of dementia, social services and the NHS, this dementia guide will give you a good place to start.

[nidirect government services](#). The benefits adviser includes a calculator for claiming benefits and getting other anyonymous advice if you live in Northern Ireland.

[Turn2us](#). With its different tools and calculators, this site can help you find benefits and grants. These allow you to check your entitlements quickly and easily. There is also a grant search tool, which can answer all your questions regarding eligibility and the application process. You can even filter results on both tools based on specific criteria, including religion, health condition, nationality, occupation, family situation or other issues. The [Alzheimer's and welfare benefits](#) section of the site may be especially helpful if you have Alzheimer's disease.

[Unforgettable](#). What benefits are there available for dementia care gives a helpful explanation of the different benefits.

[Young Dementia UK](#). The Benefits section of this website lists state benefits and grants that may apply to you, your family member or carer.

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## Memory loss and dementia: emotions and relationships

Being a friend, family member or carer for someone with memory loss or dementia can have an impact on your emotional life. While so many aspects of this person—both physical and mental—will change, it's essential for you to keep your spirits up.

### Emotional wellbeing

You may not make an immediate connection between caring for someone with dementia and your own emotional wellbeing, but it is indeed a loss. And as the condition progresses, it will be very natural for you to feel a sense of grief.

Allowing yourself to come to terms with that loss is fundamental to your emotional wellbeing. How you do this will depend on your general state of mind as well as your own support network. You may find that you're able to talk it through with family and friends, or you may discover that outside counselling is best for you, especially if you don't want to feel like you're burdening the people you love.

What matters is that you stay well and balanced and take steps to ensure that feelings of sadness or depression are acknowledged and handled with care. [The NHS Choices website has a helpful overview of Counselling](#) that can give you insight into the process. And for assistance with grief, which is common if you are living with dementia, [the Alzheimer Society offers reassurance in the Grief, loss and bereavement section of its website](#).

### **Counselling via your GP**

Depending on where you live, you may be able to get counselling via your GP, a social worker or a community nurse. If this is not available, you can ask your GP to refer you to a local organisation that may be able to help.

### **Emotional support services**

[The Alzheimer's Society has a national dementia helpline](#) that can point you in the right direction in terms of finding support. Call 0300 222 1122 for advice and assistance, whether you're a carer, family member, friend or person with dementia. [NHS Choices has its Carers Direct helpline](#), which can be reached at 0300 123 1053.

There are also carer support groups where you can talk through problems or ask for help. The number for the Carers UK hotline is 0808 808 7777. You can also call the Carers Direct hotline at 0808 802 0202.

If you prefer to find emotional support tailored specifically for Jewish people, you can contact [Jewish Care Direct](#) at 0208 922 2222. The Jewish Helpline can also assist you. That number is 0800 652 9249.

[For general emotional support any time of day or night, the Samaritans are there to help.](#)

### **Preserving relationships**

If you or someone you care about has dementia, the nature of your relationship will more than likely change. While the change may be gradual, it's important to be realistic and prepare yourself to make some adjustments.

Whether it be a family member, parent or friend who is experiencing memory loss, it will be up to you to try to imagine what it's like to have such a different sense of what's real and what's imagined. Communication is going to play a major role in your relationships.

And if the person with dementia is your spouse or partner, then the dynamic will come with additional surprises and challenges. When you think about it, relationships, in general, are fairly complicated. But when you throw memory loss or dementia into the equation, things can get pretty interesting between couples.

If your spouse or partner has been diagnosed with dementia and you will be the primary carer, changes in your physical relationship should be expected. There may be more or less interest in intimate physical contact, and the nature of that contact may not be the same as it was in the past. Roles may change, and levels of aggression may increase or decrease—there is just no set rule in terms of what you should anticipate.

[The Alzheimer's Society has a good overview of Sex and intimate relationships on its site.](#) Make sure to check out the helpful links at the bottom of the page for additional guidance.

If you are in a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender relationship and you are dealing with dementia, the Young Dementia UK website has a page devoted to this topic. Written by a clinical psychologist in training, [James on lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender relationships](#) includes insight, advice and resources to help you handle the challenges that will come with caring for yourself and your partner.

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## Memory loss and dementia: conditions

Memory loss comes with ageing; it's an accepted fact of life. For instance, Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) can change memory or other basic body activities, but it won't disrupt someone's day to day routine. Not all MCI progresses to dementia, but MCI can increase the chances of a dementia diagnosis.

Dementia is not well understood or easy to accept. Not a disease in itself, dementia (an umbrella term) occurs when there is damage from things like small strokes or genetic conditions that can change the way the brain functions.

The most common types of dementia are:

**Alzheimer's disease.** The exact cause of Alzheimer's disease is unknown, although some people think it is genetic or genetic related. This form of dementia has an impact primarily on memory, cognitive ability, insight, language and spatial awareness. One of the first noticeable symptoms of Alzheimer's disease is the loss of short-term memory. Most cases of dementia for people over the age of 65 are associated with Alzheimer's disease. Between 50% and 70% of dementia cases are linked to Alzheimer's disease. [For more on What is Alzheimer's disease, visit the Alzheimer's Society website.](#)

**Vascular dementia.** Associated with small strokes that restrict blood flow to the brain, vascular dementia also has an impact on memory, speech, language and learning. Approximately 25% of dementia cases are associated with vascular dementia. Visit the [Dementia UK site and check out the Vascular dementia page for more information](#) on this specific condition.

**Lewy body dementia (or dementia with Lewy bodies).** As with Alzheimer's disease, the cause of Lewy body dementia (or LBD) is not well known or understood. This form of dementia is frequently linked with symptoms associated with Parkinson's disease. Less about memory loss, LBD is more

about awareness and the processing of thought—particularly abstract thought. With LBD, there is often a change in physical motor skills and coordination. About 15% of dementia cases are diagnosed as dementia with Lewy bodies.

**Fronto-temporal dementia (including Pick's disease).** Fronto-temporal dementia (or FTD) is primarily thought to be linked to genetics. It primarily impacts personality and behaviour, although problems with spatial orientation and speech can also appear with FTD. Frequently diagnosed between the ages of 45 to 65, FTD is responsible for 20% of young onset dementia cases. It is the least common type of dementia in older adults. For more information, [visit the Young Dementia UK site and go to the Frontotemporal dementias page](#), where you can download a PDF with even more information on the subject.

For more guidance on memory loss diagnosis and assessment, the NHS offers memory services and clinics. Available throughout the country, these clinics can not only test for signs of dementia, but they can also offer support. Visit the NHS choices section on [Getting a dementia diagnosis](#) for more information.

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### Memory loss and dementia: charities

There are many charities in the UK providing information, advice, support, services and products to people living with memory loss and dementia, as well as their friends, families and carers.

To make your search that little bit easier, we've put the charities into three different groups, as follows:

- Dementia support charities;
- Dementia research charities; and
- Charities supporting older people that also provide dementia support.

#### Dementia support charities

[Alzheimer's Society](#). The Alzheimer's Society is a national advice, support and research charity for all people affected by dementia.

[Alzheimer Scotland Action on Dementia](#). Alzheimer Scotland provides support services, community activities, information and advice for people with dementia and their carers.

[Dementia Gateway \(part of SCIE\)](#). The Dementia Gateway, run by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), is an online resource containing supportive information for carers, people living with dementia and their friends and family.

[Dementia UK](#). Dementia UK is a national charity providing one to one support for people living with dementia and their families through their Admiral Nurse programme.

[Jewish Care's Community Support and Social Work service](#). By supporting individuals, families and

communities, this service enables people to identify care options that offer dignity and choice. It also advocates on behalf of people whilst offering advice and guidance. Call 0208 922 2222 or send an email to [helpline@jcare.org](mailto:helpline@jcare.org).

[Young Dementia UK](#). Young Dementia UK is a national charity providing information, advice and resources for people with young onset dementia as well as their friends, families and wider care networks.

### **Dementia research charities**

[Alzheimer's Research UK](#). Alzheimer's Research UK funds innovative research that seeks to defeat dementia.

[Lewy Body Society](#). The Lewy Body Society supports research and awareness into Lewy body disease and other causes of dementia.

### **Charities supporting older people**

[Age UK](#). Age UK is the largest national charity that provides information, advice, support and products for older people as well as their friends, families and carers. This includes people living with dementia.

[Independent Age](#). Independent age is a national charity that offers free information and advice for older people on care, benefits, social support and daily living. As dementia is mainly prevalent amongst older people, the organisation also provides information living with dementia.

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## **Memory loss and dementia: alternative therapies**

Since many forms of memory loss can be progressive (in other words, symptoms increase over time), it may be worthwhile to look at treatments that do not aim to cure this condition—but instead, they help to manage its symptoms. Many of these therapies can be pleasant to practice, especially since they focus on wellbeing and mood. There is also research to suggest that natural therapies, if started early enough, can actually slow (and possibly even prevent) the onset of memory loss and other forms of dementia when teamed with healthy lifestyle choices.

These alternative therapies can include any one (or all) of the following:

- Aromatherapy;
- Diet; and
- Lifestyle.

### **Aromatherapy treatment**

People have used essential oils for therapeutic reasons for hundreds of years. More recently, research has provided evidence that gives more weight to the healing power of oils and their positive connection to wellbeing. There are many choices out there, with each essence having special properties to address all kinds of ailments and symptoms.

## What can different essential oils do?

For dementia, the following essential oils are often recommended.

- **Bergamot.** Relieves stress and agitation.
- **Lavender.** Well known for its relaxing properties, this is a good one for someone struggling with anxiety or sleep issues.
- **Lemon balm.** Promotes calm and relaxation.
- **Peppermint.** This scent is both calming and stimulating at the same time. It's to use first thing in the morning.
- **Rosemary.** Uplifting and stimulating for both mind and body, it's also been known to relieve depression and even revive a low appetite.

There really are no rules. Sometimes just finding an appealing scent that creates a positive response is a good enough reason to choose it!

## How do you use essential oils?

There are several ways to introduce essential oils into the activities you may have with someone who is living with memory loss.

- **Bath oils.** Add to a warm bath for a relaxing experience at the end of the day. One of the great benefits to this practice is that it can also relieve any muscular discomfort and prepare the mind and body for sleep.
- **Massage.** This can be incredibly relaxing, combining both the senses of smell and touch. However, before attempting this therapy, it's important to make sure that the recipient is happy to be touched. Also, make sure to find out about any skin conditions that could be aggravated by a massage with essential oils.
- **Mist.** Add several drops of oil to some water in a mister bottle. Shake well to mix and spray into the air.
- **Moisturisers.** Putting a few drops of essential oil in an unscented moisturiser can make a wonderful hand or face cream.
- **Scented pillows and tissues.** Dabbing a few drops of oil on these can be a great way of enjoying a subtle encounter with the fragrance.

You can find more ways of exploring aromatherapy by searching online or looking through some books that specialise on the topic. Many good bookshops will have a decent selection in this subject area.

Once you have discovered a practice that is effective, there's no reason why you couldn't make the process a regularly scheduled experience. As long as the person receiving the treatment is keen, many of these ideas can be enjoyed several times a week—or even daily.

Please consider the following precautions.

- **Avoid trigger smells.** Be extra careful about the possibility that certain smells may trigger unexpected (or even unwanted) memories for a person with dementia. This can be confusing or distressing for them. Every person will react differently to a particular scent, so if one person reacts positively to a floral scent, another person may find the smell nauseating. It's important to be ready



for this and to stop the practice if the affected person is not enjoying the experience.

- **Dilute them.** Aromatherapy oils can be quite potent and should not be used in undiluted form. Side effects could include headaches, which a person with dementia might not be able to describe or explain.

- **Keep fresh air coming.** Always remember to practice in a well-ventilated room.

- **Select appropriately.** You should be mindful about which scents are stimulating oils (best used at the start of the day), and likewise, which scents have more relaxing qualities (most effective before bed).

TIP: It's worth preparing a sample offering of a scent first (perhaps a drop or two on a tissue) to make sure it is agreeable before using it for a massage or adding it to a bath. Also, always remember to check labels on boxes when purchasing a new essential oil; it can be helpful to do your own research into the benefits and potential risks of using a particular scent.

[For more information and practical tips, visit the Dementia UK Aromatherapy page.](#)

### Diet modifications

Several scientific studies have been conducted in recent years to investigate how diet impacts overall health and wellbeing. Many of these studies have focused on the subject of dementia (in particular) as well as overall mental health.

The findings have sometimes been astounding, with many claiming that specific choices can have a huge impact on mental wellbeing. Some studies have suggested that switching to a healthier diet can even have a positive impact on the onset of dementia symptoms.

So with this in mind, what dietary changes should you make to slow or even halt the progression of memory loss?

The brain needs healthy nutrients to function properly and keep you going as long as possible. Many nutritionists and other professionals specialising in diet have looked into the connections between the food you eat and the effects of those choices on mental health and wellbeing.

### Stay away from sugar

There is now some evidence to suggest that high levels of sugar can have an impact on the brain and how it functions. Cutting out sugary foods changes everything from creating and retaining memories to improving judgement and making decisions.

Most nutritionists would now suggest you cut down on (or avoid completely) the following:

- **Alcohol particularly beer**, which has been linked to Alzheimer's disease.
- Processed foods from sandwich meat to processed cheese (like the ones that come in squeezable tubes)—this even holds true for kosher options.
- **Refined carbohydrates** like white pasta, white rice and white bread.
- **Sugar or any foods** that contain a high sugar content (like cakes, doughnuts and pastries) and many popular soft drinks (like fizzy pop and even fruit juices and smoothies).

## Seek smarter choices...and dark chocolate!

Instead, nutritionists suggest replacing these foods with:

- **Berries and dark-skinned fruits** are great, so go ahead and fill up on everything from strawberries and blueberries, to cherries, plums and oranges!
- **Coffee and dark chocolate** can be a nice treat as long as you don't enjoy them too late in the day (which may interfere with your sleep). Caffeine is even thought to boost memory function, but make sure you consume it in moderation.
- **Leafy green vegetables** are nutrient rich, which means you can experience the benefits of things like spinach and kale.
- Omega-3 sources are found in oily fish (such as mackerel, sardines and salmon) and beans (such as kidney beans and black beans). You can even find it in walnuts and flax seeds.
- **Water** makes every part of your body work better. Drinking water throughout the day is essential when it comes to keeping you hydrated.
- **Wholegrain foods** are better options, so try to look for brown bread, brown rice and wholemeal pasta.

## Lifestyle adjustments

While a healthy diet may delay or slow the onset of memory loss, there are other lifestyle choices that can help someone with dementia feel healthy and strong. Here are some suggestions:

### Memory loss and exercise

Just 30 minutes of exercise every day can have a positive influence on both mental and physical wellbeing. It doesn't have to be anything too strenuous; in fact, a brisk walk can be the perfect activity.

TIP: A good route would include a few inclines—enough to get the heart beating a little faster than usual at intervals throughout your walk.

Other than the physical benefits, walking is also great for mental wellbeing. Many scientific studies have revealed that getting out into nature, either by visiting a local park or public garden, can do wonders for mood by relieving stress and anxiety. Sensory gardens can be particularly appealing to people with memory loss because they can stimulate the senses through sight, sound and smell.

### Memory loss and sleep

Many scientific reports are now finding links between sleep and the onset of dementia symptoms. Getting a good night's sleep can help reduce symptoms.

If there are sleep issues, here are some non-medical steps to take:

- **Caffeine.** Avoid caffeine too late in the day. It might be best to limit intake to one or two cups of tea or coffee before lunch and try some caffeine-free alternatives, such as herbal teas, in the afternoon or evening.
- **Environment.** Create an ideal environment by making the bedroom as comfortable as possible.
- **Naps.** These should be limited during the day since they may have a negative impact on night-time routines.
- **Schedules.** While not essential, it is a good idea for someone with memory loss to wake up and get

out of bed at the same time every morning.

For more help with sleep-related issues, read the section on [Sleep disturbance and waking up at night from the Alzheimer's Society](#).

### Memory loss and meditation

The health benefits of meditating are now widely promoted by a variety of health professionals who believe it can do wonders for both mental and physical wellbeing. There are some scientists who believe that if practiced early enough and regularly, meditation can help to slow down or even reduce symptoms of dementia.

### Memory loss and learning

It sounds obvious but there really is importance to giving the brain a regular workout! People who use their brains regularly can help to keep them healthy.

One suggestion is to try learning new things. It doesn't have to be a huge project, like taking up a new language, although some programmes do just that. This [article about a care home language course demonstrates how it's never too late to learn a new language](#).

Simply learning a new skill or taking up a hobby that requires some concentration, such as a game of cards or chess, can be an excellent activity for someone with memory loss. Reading is another activity that flexes the mental muscle. There are even some basic (and creative) activities around reading that involve memorising a favourite poem or passage in a book. These can be shared with friends and family members when spending time together or they can just be quietly enjoyed and savoured when alone.

### Final thoughts on memory loss and alternative therapies

It's important to note that none of these suggestions should be used to replace medical treatment. However, they can often be used in conjunction with other more traditional approaches. As an aside, it's amazing how a positive mood and good general health can even make someone more receptive to traditional forms of medication.

Remember that it's never too early to start. Getting into the habit of living a positive and healthy lifestyle prepares people to handle mental or physical challenges that happen along the way.

Give it a go and start experiencing the rewards of natural remedies!

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### Memory loss and dementia: celebrating holidays and festivals

The anticipation of an upcoming religious holiday or event often comes with its share of excitement. Preparations for the festivities can put you in a happy mood, as you contemplate sharing the significance of the occasion.

Over time, you and your family may host guests who will require a little more care and attention

to make them feel included and part of the festivities. For example, a guest who has dementia or another form of memory loss will need you to make some extra preparations in order to ensure that they are comfortable and able to join in the fun.

But by making a few adjustments to the planned activities—and paying attention to the needs and limitations of your guest (or guests!)—your festival celebrations can be joyous events for everyone.

### **Planning for the event**

Here are some things to think about prior to the day. Please keep in mind this is just a guide; each person's requirements may be different.

First, think of general practicalities:

- 1. Who else is on the guest list?** A person with dementia can easily feel anxious if they are amongst people they don't recognise. If any members of the family have changed their appearance significantly since the last time you were all together, it could be a good idea to explain this ahead of time. For example, you could show them 'before and after' photographs, so that they are familiar with someone's new beard or hair colour, and will hopefully recognise them more easily on the day. TIP: It may also be a good idea to discreetly inform other guests (who aren't already aware) that a particular friend or family member has dementia. If they are prepared for—and able to understand—any unusual behaviour, it may help to avoid any potentially awkward situations.
- 2. Where are your facilities?** It's a good idea to ensure that necessities like toilets are easy to find and equipped with any additional conveniences that might be needed. A person with dementia will be a lot more comfortable knowing that these preparations have been made. If your guest has a carer joining them for extra assistance on the day, let them know this information as well.
- 3. Extra consideration during the meal.** Make sure you know in advance whether your guest might require additional help at the dinner table. For example, they may struggle to cut their food or eat large pieces. To avoid embarrassment during the meal, it would be sensible to research this issue, so you can discreetly prepare their plate accordingly and serve it to them without calling any extra attention to it.
- 4. Traditional reading material.** Consider whether your guest with dementia might want to join in during prayers and would like their own copy of religious reading material. These can be easily obtained in larger print editions if required, but you'll need to prepare for this ahead of the day to ensure you have it ready for the occasion. You may also need to enquire whether your guest will need help turning pages or holding onto reading material during prayer time—and assist them if necessary.
- 5. Seating plans.** This is applicable both at the dinner table and also during other activities. Make sure that you seat someone with dementia in a position that is included in the celebrations (not just shoved in a quiet corner and forgotten about). But be mindful not to trap them in an over stimulating environment; for example, don't place them at the kids' end of the dining table where noise and chaos could trigger anxiety and stress.
- 6. Quiet time.** Make sure that, however you decide to plan the schedule for the day, there is space for

a quiet zone where a guest with dementia can retreat to if they need a little time to themselves. This could ideally be a spare bedroom, so they can have a lie down if they feel like it.

**7. Check in.** It's really important that you regularly check on a family member with dementia to ensure they are feeling comfortable. Don't overdo it, as this could then have the reverse effect! But it's good to be aware if they are starting to feel overwhelmed, so you can take action quickly and diffuse any stress before it becomes an issue.

**8. Accept help.** If you have the resources, consider hiring someone to help for the day to assist you with cooking, clearing up, etc. This may enable you to spend more time with your guests, and in particular, attend to the needs of a family member with dementia. This will help you from feeling overwhelmed yourself.

**9. Be flexible.** Dementia varies, often significantly, from person to person, so it's important not to have any expectations of how an activity or experience will pan out. Often the holiday, in its entirety, might not go completely to plan, but some aspects of it will be enjoyed. It's these special moments that, if you take care to notice them, will make the whole experience meaningful and worthwhile.

**10. Stick to a schedule.** While being flexible will be essential, just remember that a person with dementia will very often rely on a regular daily routine to create security and comfort. Visiting friends or family outside of their usual environment, and taking part in unfamiliar activities, could cause anxiety. Try, where possible, to be considerate of their routine (as the less it changes, the more likely they are to feel comfortable). For example, if your guest eats lunch or dinner at a certain time each day, perhaps try to follow these timings for your own festive meal. TIP: Another good idea could be to prepare a schedule for the day in advance, and go through it with them so they will be a little more prepared. This doesn't need to be too detailed, but you could set out an order of events, such as:

- 11am: Arrive for tea/coffee and chat/activity before lunch.
- 12pm: Sit down for lunch.
- 1pm: A game with the children.
- 1.30pm: Gift giving with tea/coffee and chat.
- 2pm: A bit of quiet time, for kids watching TV and adults relaxing (or even having a snooze, if required!).
- 3pm: Afternoon tea and a casual activity (optional).
- 4pm: Home time.

### What activities could you plan?

There are a number of things you can include in your festivities. Here are a few suggestions.

#### Rekindle memories

Activities that spark fond memories, such as old family traditions from childhood, could be a really enjoyable experience for someone with dementia. Think about singing traditional holiday songs, watching favourite holiday movies or flicking through old photo albums. This kind of activity is

something all family members can get involved in too, and it's a great way to bring young and older generations together.

### **Cook together!**

There is evidence to support the idea that stimulating the sense of smell can be particularly powerful for people with dementia. If you are planning to cook a traditional holiday recipe, the familiar aromas of the dish may not only stir up an appetite, but they could be a soothing experience for a guest with dementia.

This activity could also become a nice opportunity for discussion. Younger family members may join in and perhaps be interested to know what festivals were like for their grandparents as they were growing up. They may also want to talk about treats that were served in the past.

Some ideas for healthy recipes specific to religious festivals could include:

- Honey cake (Rosh Hashanah)
- Hamentaschen (Purim)
- Doughnuts (Chanukah)
- Macaroons (Pesach)
- Cheese Blintzes (Shavuot)

### **Create a memory box**

Compiling a box with a special selection of items that represent the traditions of the festival you are about to celebrate can be a really fun way of preparing a family member with dementia for the upcoming occasion. It's another activity that all generations of the family can join in on, and it can be a great way to inspire discussions of past memories.

Examples of items for specific festival boxes could be:

- Rosh Hashanah: an apple, a mini pot of honey, a slice of honey cake.
- Pesach: symbols from the Seder plate (like parsley, a boiled egg, matzah).
- Purim: Hamentaschen, musical instruments, props for fancy dress.
- Chanukah: doughnuts, a dreidel and chocolate coins, a menorah.

### **Assign a role**

For someone with dementia, a good way of feeling connected to an environment is having a role or purpose. If you can think of something straightforward for your guest to do during the celebrations it might make them feel more included. Think of things like passing around the matzah during the Passover meal, or drizzling honey over apples when celebrating Rosh Hashanah.

### **Be creative**

You could also try including some games or arts and crafts projects to the celebrations. Depending on the festival, there are many options available, including everything from playing dreidel at Chanukah to making patriotic decorations in celebration of Yom Ha'atzmut (Israel Independence

Day).

Hanging decorations can also be an enjoyable activity to share amongst family members. A person with dementia may really enjoy decorating a paper garland and helping to drape it across a mantelpiece once completed.

TIP: Make sure you are aware of a person's limitations before assigning them with any task. It's not always obvious what they are capable of, and it's important you don't put them at risk of injuring themselves.

### **Tell a good story**

Perhaps read or retell the story of the festival you're celebrating. Many families already do this as part of their tradition on the day, particularly for younger members of the family to enjoy. But this can also be a great way for someone with dementia to connect with the day and re-familiarise themselves with the reasons why they are joining their friends and family to celebrate the occasion.

TIP: Be mindful of overwhelming your guest. Loud noises or excess use of technology could be stressful for someone with dementia.

Above all, remember:

- Be flexible. If the day doesn't go as planned, sometimes just forgetting the schedule and going with the flow can be a good way to keep stress and anxiety to a minimum.
- Lower your expectations of what you want out of the day, and be mindful to notice when everyone is having a nice time—even if it's only for fleeting moments throughout the day.
- You have done a great thing in creating an opportunity for everyone to be together, enjoy old memories and traditions and create new experiences.

