

What to Do Following a Dementia Diagnosis

A Comprehensive Guide for Family Members

The Monarch
SENIOR LIVING

Receiving a dementia diagnosis for a loved one can feel overwhelming. This diagnosis not only affects the individual who received the diagnosis, but it also dramatically impacts their family members. This diagnosis is a journey filled with challenges, but knowing what to expect and how to navigate this path can make a significant difference in your overall experience.

The Monarch Senior Living understands how confusing this time can be and offers compassionate memory care options. Our team is here to help guide you through every step of your journey, starting with what you should do after a family member receives a dementia diagnosis.



Understanding Dementia

Dementia is not a specific disease but a term that describes a group of symptoms affecting memory, thinking, and social abilities severely enough to interfere with daily life. It is a progressive condition, meaning it worsens over time. However, many people with dementia can lead active and fulfilling lives for years.



ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia, accounting for 60 to 80 percent of all dementia cases. It typically starts slow and gradually worsens. Memory loss is often the initial symptom, followed by increasing difficulty with language, decision-making, reasoning, and, ultimately, self-care. There is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease, but treatments can slow the progression and improve overall well-being.

VASCULAR DEMENTIA

Vascular dementia is the second most common type of dementia. It occurs when conditions such as stroke or atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) damage the brain's blood vessels, preventing brain cells from receiving the nutrients and oxygen they need. Early detection and control of these conditions can halt dementia's progress and prevent further brain damage.

Although it affects everyone differently, common symptoms of this specific type of dementia include physical stroke symptoms such as a sudden headache, numbness or paralysis on one side of the face or body, poor balance, confusion, and disorientation.

FRONTOTEMPORAL DEMENTIA

Frontotemporal dementia is characterized by progressive nerve cell loss in the brain's frontal or temporal lobes. This occurs when these areas of the brain shrink in size. Because the frontal and temporal lobes influence behavior and language, the most common symptoms of frontotemporal dementia include changes in personality and behavior and difficulties with language.

LEWY BODY DEMENTIA

Lewy body dementia is caused by abnormal protein deposits in the brain called alpha-synuclein. These deposits affect chemicals in the brain and lead to problems with thinking, behavior, mood, and movement. Some of the most prevalent symptoms of this condition include visual hallucinations, unpredictable changes in wakefulness, muscle rigidity or stiffness, stooped posture, and difficulty swallowing.

How to Communicate with a Family Member with Dementia

Effective communication with a family member living with dementia is crucial for maintaining a connection. Here are some tips:

Use simple, clear sentences: Speak slowly, articulate each word distinctly, and ensure your family member understands you. When communicating with someone with dementia, it is crucial to use straightforward and clear language. It is also helpful to use short sentences with a singular idea, as multiple concepts in one sentence can be hard to understand. Make sure to pause after each sentence to give them time to process what you have said.

Maintain eye contact: This helps draw their attention to your conversation. Eye contact plays a fundamental role in conversation by helping to establish a connection and, more importantly, signaling that you have your family member's full attention. Make sure to maintain eye contact as much as possible when speaking. This can help them focus on the conversation and convey your sincerity and eagerness to communicate effectively.

Use body language: Non-verbal cues can communicate your feelings and intentions. Non-verbal communication, such as body language, can be extremely powerful, especially when words become more challenging to understand. Simple gestures, a gentle touch, or a warm smile can communicate your feelings, intentions, and reassurances. Moreover, using visual cues or demonstrating the action you are talking about can aid their understanding.



Be patient and supportive: Allow your family member time to process information and respond. Patience is key when conversing with someone with dementia. It is important to remember that dementia can slow their mental processes, making it challenging to understand and respond promptly. Always allow ample time for your family member to process the information and respond in their own time. Even when their response seems unclear, respond positively to encourage further communication. Remember, the goal is to maintain a connection, not to have a perfect conversation.



Coping Strategies for Family Members

Coping with a family member's dementia diagnosis can be emotionally challenging but knowing what to do after the diagnosis can significantly ease your stress.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

Understand your family member's condition. Knowledge can empower you to find or provide effective care, and understanding the intricacies of your family member's condition can work wonders in preparing you for future challenges. Delve into reliable medical sources, engage with healthcare professionals, and tap into educational resources offered by dementia support organizations. The more you know, the better equipped you will be to navigate the diagnosis and condition.

JOIN A SUPPORT GROUP

Connect with others facing similar challenges. Their experiences and insights might be helpful. Caring for someone with dementia can sometimes feel isolating, so connecting with others in similar situations can provide a sense of community and shared understanding.

Support groups offer a safe space to express feelings, share experiences, and learn from others navigating the same path. Connecting with local support groups and resources can provide practical assistance, emotional support, and valuable information. Reach out to local health centers, community organizations, or online platforms that offer resources for dementia caregivers.



TAKE CARE OF YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

Stress can have a detrimental impact on your physical health, making it even more difficult to care for someone else or navigate the dementia care journey. Regular exercise, a balanced diet, and adequate sleep can enhance your ability to cope. These fundamental aspects of self-care can keep you physically strong and emotionally resilient during this challenging time.



LEGAL AND FINANCIAL PLANNING

Because dementia is a progressive condition, it is all the more important to address legal and financial matters early on. Consult an attorney who specializes in elder law to create legal documents like a power of attorney for healthcare and finances, a living will, and possibly a guardianship arrangement. These documents ensure that your family member's wishes are honored and that you can make decisions on their behalf if and when it becomes necessary.

ENCOURAGE ENGAGEMENT

Keeping the mind active and engaged can help slow cognitive decline. Encourage your family member to pursue hobbies they enjoy, such as puzzles, arts and crafts, gardening, or listening to music. Staying engaged helps provide a sense of purpose and boosts their overall well-being.

EMBRACE FLEXIBILITY

Dementia is unpredictable, and your parent or family member's needs may change rapidly. Be prepared to adapt your care plan and daily routines to accommodate their evolving needs. Flexibility is key to providing the best care and maintaining a positive atmosphere.



CELEBRATE SMALL VICTORIES

Dementia presents numerous challenges, but it is essential to celebrate the small victories along the way. Whether it is a smile or a successful day, these moments remind you of the person your family member still is despite the condition.

EXPLORE CARE OPTIONS

There may come a time when your family member needs the additional support offered in a memory care community. Memory care communities provide specialized programs that are designed to slow the progression of dementia through engagement and personalized care.

Look into these options to discover how memory care could enhance your family member's overall health and well-being.

Memory Care at The Monarch Senior Living

At The Monarch Senior Living, our Valeo™ memory care services are designed to provide specialized support personalized to each resident. Meaning "to thrive" in Latin, Valeo™ consists of signature programs that each contribute to overall wellness, engagement, cognitive health, and joy. Every program we offer is customized to each person's strengths and provides opportunities to engage and pursue individual interests.



Navigating your family member's dementia journey can be challenging, but remember, you are not alone. Countless resources are available to you, and our team is always ready and happy to help.

It is also important to remember that despite their diagnosis, your family member can still experience joy, connect with others, and maintain a sense of self. Through patience, understanding, and a caring approach, you can make a significant difference in your family member's overall health and wellness. Above all else, remember that love, respect, and dignity are what individuals with dementia deserve most from us.

We invite you to contact a member of our dedicated team. to learn more about The Monarch Senior Living and the memory care programs we offer.

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