

# Patient information from BMJ

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## Caring for someone with dementia

**People with Alzheimer's disease or another type of dementia gradually lose the ability to look after themselves. Their personality also changes.**

**It can be heartbreaking to watch a person close to you change in this way. There will also probably be times when it seems as if they're being deliberately difficult. But it's important to remember that your relative or loved one can't help their behaviour.**

You might find it helpful to try to relate to what the person is feeling, rather than what they're saying. For example, if someone thinks their things are being stolen, it might be because they are anxious about forgetting where they've put things.

You could try putting labels on things, or making sure things are always put away in the same place.

If your loved one or relative has **delusions** (believes things that aren't true) or **hallucinations** (hears or sees things that aren't really there), there's no point in trying to persuade them that the things they think are happening aren't real. You also shouldn't actively agree that these things are happening.

It's better to gently distract or reassure them than argue. Simple things, like going for a drive or listening to music, may help.

You also need to make sure you have some time to yourself. It might help to have a few days away every so often. You might consider respite care, where your loved one spends a few days in a suitable care centre.

You might feel guilty about doing this. But looking after your own needs will help you take better care of your loved one. Taking time away can also help stop you becoming stressed or depressed.

There will probably be a time when you need to think about getting regular help. This could be extra help at home, or in a residential care home or a nursing home.

- Help at home can include help with washing, dressing, shopping, and cooking. It can also include practical changes to your home or equipment to make it easier for someone

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with dementia to live safely at home. For example, timers can be fitted to kettles and ovens to remind people they have water boiling or food in the oven, and special cups and cutlery can help people feed themselves for longer. Walkers and railings can help people get around the home and carry out tasks like washing.

- Residential care homes offer help with personal care, such as washing, dressing, and getting to the toilet.
- Nursing homes have a trained nurse on duty at all times, and offer more intensive nursing care. This may be needed if a person is very confused or is unable to control when they go to the toilet.

These can be difficult decisions to make and you may need a lot of help to decide what's best. You may want to think about these things sooner rather than later, so that you'll have plenty of time to look around and make the right choice.

There are organisations and charities that provide advice and support for people with dementia and their carers. In the UK, for example, you can contact the Alzheimer's Society ([alzheimers.org.uk](http://alzheimers.org.uk)) and Alzheimer Scotland ([alzscot.org](http://alzscot.org)).

Your doctor might be able to help you find support in your area, or you can search online.

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