

Please contact the Reitman Centre to learn more about the services and programs for caregivers.



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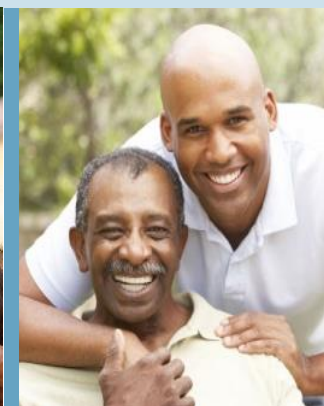
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The Cyril & Dorothy, Joel & Jill Reitman  
Centre for Alzheimer's Support and Training



# 60 Tips

Strategies to help you care for yourself  
while caring for a family member or  
friend with dementia



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Family caregivers are vital to ensure the health and quality of life of a patient with dementia. Research shows that as a caregiver, your own health and wellbeing can be affected. The caregiving process is complex and challenging. You may experience anxiety about the multiple changes in your own life.

The goal of this 60 Tips booklet is to offer some suggestions to help you take care of yourself while you care for your family member or friend with dementia. Topics in this booklet include:

- Memory strategies and good brain health
- Effective communication strategies when talking with or visiting someone with dementia
- Mindfulness and stress management ideas to help you cope as a caregiver
- Accessing community resources you may need now or in the future

Not all of the strategies will apply to you, as each caregiver and family is unique. You may need to experiment to make these strategies most useful to you.

The Reitman Centre Team is available to meet with you to see how we can help.



# 10 Effective

Memory changes are often a normal part of getting older. People naturally use strategies to help them, but the tips in this list can help to navigate everyday memory challenges.

## 1. Focus your attention.

- ◇ To remember something later, you must have paid attention to it in the first place.
- ◇ For example, as you put your eyeglasses down, say out loud, “I am putting my glasses on the dresser.”

## 2. Reduce distractions. Don't multitask.

- ◇ Focusing on one thing at a time helps you remember it later.
- ◇ For example, when you speak on the telephone, turn off the radio or TV in the background.

## 3. Write it down.

- ◇ Writing something down helps you pay attention to the information and keeps it organized. You might remember the information without reading your note, but you have it if you need it.

## 4. Be organized.

- ◇ Habits help. Put things away in the same place every time.
- ◇ For example, use a calendar or date book to keep all your appointments in one place instead of on scraps of paper.
- ◇ If you often forget your keys and wallet, put a checklist on the back of your front door.

## 5. Make things obvious.

- ◇ Reduce clutter so you can easily see things at a glance.
- ◇ For example, clean out your purse and have smaller compartments for specific things. Put makeup in one clear baggie and a pen and notebook in another.

# Memory Strategies

## 6. Use technology.

- ◇ Electronic reminders and cell phones are easy and handy ways to organize information.
- ◇ You can set an alarm to remind yourself of when you need to take your medication or go to an appointment.

## 7. Group things together. Use location to remind you.

- ◇ For example, if you often forget to take your medication, use a pill box and put it by your toothbrush, or where you keep your coffee mug.

## 8. Repeat things, and repeat them over long periods of time.

- ◇ Spacing out repetitions is the most effective way to remember the information later.
- ◇ For example, to learn someone's name: repeat it immediately and again a little later in the conversation. Then say the name to yourself later in the day. And maybe even repeat it to yourself the next day.

## 9. Add a layer of meaning when you are learning something.

- ◇ Connect the new information you are learning to information you already know.
- ◇ For example, the person you just met has the same name as your niece. Picture them talking together. Making the image a bit silly will make it easier to remember. Picture your niece giving your new friend a piggyback ride.

## 10. Don't sweat mistakes.

- ◇ Everyone makes mistakes. Anxiety about memory slips actually interferes with your ability to pay attention.
- ◇ If you find changes to your memory are impacting your day to day functioning, talk to your doctor.



# 10 Tips for

These are some controllable health factors that will influence your memory and brain health:

1. **Check your hearing and vision.** Hearing or vision problems can affect how well you are able to take in information to be remembered.
2. **Manage your stress.** When you are racing around during the day and feeling overwhelmed, your body produces a hormone called cortisol. Too much cortisol can interfere with the ability to take in new information or recall it later.
3. **Pay attention to your mood.** When you are feeling anxious or depressed you tend to be distracted by your own thoughts and feelings, making it hard to pay attention to things you want to remember. Chronic depression has also been linked with the development of dementia, so it is important to seek professional help if you are feeling this way.
4. **Get good quality sleep.** Not only can poor sleep affect your mood and ability to pay attention during the day, but it also interferes with how the brain stores memories at night. A disorder called sleep apnea can also have negative effects on brain health by decreasing the amount of oxygen that reaches the brain.
5. **Ask about your medications.** Some medications can interfere with memory and attention. It is worth talking to your doctor about the medications you take if you are worried about your memory.

# Good Brain Health

6. **Manage your pain.** Poorly managed pain is distracting when you are trying to store new memories or access old ones.
7. **Make sure your diabetes is well controlled.** Type 2 diabetes and problems metabolizing glucose have been connected to increased risk of brain disease, including dementia. Keep your brain healthy by keeping your blood sugars stable.
8. **Monitor your heart health.** Cardiovascular disease is a significant factor in the development of vascular dementia. Try to reduce cardiovascular risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking, and obesity.
9. **Address any new medical issues.** There are many acute medical problems that can affect your cognitive functioning and are treatable. See your doctor regularly to monitor your physical health.
10. **Stay engaged physically and socially.** There is evidence that physical activity, a healthy diet, and social engagement can improve cognitive functioning and decrease the risk for dementia.



# 10 Tips When Talking with

Being able to communicate clearly with a person with dementia has benefits for each person and your relationship. Using these tips may help you both feel understood.

## 1. Ensure hearing and vision are functioning properly:

- ◇ If hearing or vision appears to be a problem, get an assessment.
- ◇ A family doctor can start assessments and refer to specialists.

## 2. Get up close and “personal”:

- ◇ Use the person’s name and look them in the eye.
- ◇ Sit or stand at the same level as the person you are speaking to.

## 3. Reduce choices:

- ◇ Too many choices can frustrate someone with dementia.
- ◇ Avoid open-ended questions.
- ◇ For example, if you are discussing outdoor activities, **don’t ask**, “Where would you like to go today?” It’s **better to ask**, “Would you like to go to the park?”

## 4. Diminish distractions:

- ◇ Background noise from TV, radio or even a fan can distract the person during a conversation. Turn these off.
- ◇ Talking and listening in a group may confuse or overwhelm
- ◇ The person may lose track of conversations in these situations. Find a quiet place to talk.

## 5. Keep things simple:

- ◇ Refer to nouns by their actual name. For example, during a walk, when pointing out a pretty bird, say “bird” instead of “it”.

## 6. Avoid conflict:

- ◇ Don’t argue with a person who has dementia. Arguing will make both of you more agitated. Recognize when walking away from a building argument is the best course of action.
- ◇ Avoid comments, such as: “I just told you that,” and “You’re wrong” as these may make the situation worse.

# Someone with Dementia

## 7. Enter their world:

- ◇ Validate the feelings and/or thoughts of a person with dementia.
- ◇ For example, if the person believes they have been left alone, while in reality their caregiver was in the other room, you might say “You must have felt alone, and I know you don’t like that feeling. I’m here now.”

## 8. Extra points for patience:

- ◇ Slow down. Don’t rush.
- ◇ Try not to complete their sentences. It won’t help them remember and it can be more frustrating and take more time.
- ◇ Try asking a question that might jog their memory. For example, if they are wandering around the kitchen and saying, “I want...I want...,” you can ask, “Are you hungry? Would you like something to eat?”

## 9. Clue into their visual cues:

- ◇ Your family member or friend may not be able to clearly talk about their emotions. Paying attention to their facial expressions and body position can help understand them.
- ◇ Body language is a powerful communication tool too. Physical signs or gestures can help to communicate. For example, when someone is looking around their bed they might be looking for an item they need.

## 10. Get creative with your communication:

- ◇ If words are not sufficient to get your point across, don’t be afraid to experiment with different types of communication.
- ◇ Use verbal, visual and auditory cues, and gentle touch to help your loved one understand.
- ◇ For example, if it is time to get out of bed, open the curtains, show them the light outside, and show them their daytime clothes.





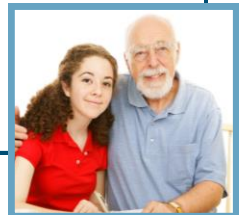
# 10 Tips When Visiting

While visiting someone with dementia is very important, it can also present some new or unexpected challenges. Below are 10 tips on that may help to ensure a more successful visit for you and the person with dementia.

- 1. Plan Ahead.** Plan to do a meaningful activity together, as it can be helpful to bring focus to a visit.
  - ◇ Try activities such as looking at a photo album, listening to music, having a snack, taking a walk or a drive.
- 2. Timing.** Find out what time of the day is best to visit the person. Try to avoid visiting when other activities are scheduled at the centre or home.
  - ◇ In general, it is best to plan the visit for the late morning or early afternoon.
- 3. Keep Things Calm.** Avoid large groups, events and places with lots of noise and distractions. These kinds of places can become confusing and overwhelming.
  - ◇ Take a one-on-one walk to get a break from a larger group activity.
- 4. Short Visits.** Regular short visits are best.
  - ◇ If you plan a longer visit, your friend or family member may get tired or overwhelmed. They may need a break of time to rest.
- 5. Use Clues and Cues.** Use verbal cues, and gestures to orient the person.
  - ◇ Introducing yourself or others by your name and connection can be helpful. For example “I was talking to Sheila, my daughter, yesterday”.
  - ◇ Non-verbal signals such as touching or pointing to an item when talking about it can also be helpful.

# Someone with Dementia

- 6. Be respectful.** Remember that the person has a life rich with history, experience, relationships, skills, hopes and dreams.
  - ◇ Treat them with respect by trying not to talk about or over the person.
- 7. Listen.** It is important the person has time to feel heard. If the person is feeling sad, let them express their feelings without trying to make them feel better right away.
  - ◇ Sometimes the best thing to do is to just listen, and show that you care.
- 8. Use Touch.** Gentle touch can be comforting and reassuring.
  - ◇ Holding a hand and a friendly hug can maintain much needed connection.
- 9. Educate Yourself.** Knowing about dementia can help to understand what your family member or friend is going through.
  - ◇ Understanding the illness can help you to cope more effectively with changes and challenges.
- 10. Self Care is Important.** There are many issues around changing roles and losses that affect families, friends and carers of people with dementia. Remember that your visit is important. People with dementia need emotional support for their well-being. It's also important to take care of yourself. After a difficult visit, take time for yourself or connect with a supportive friend or professional.



# 10 Tips to help Caregivers

Being in the present moment is a helpful skill to manage stress; anxiety and difficult emotions while caregiving. When we practice being in the moment, our body can get a break from the stress response of “fight or flight”.

With practice, these tips can help reduce stress and help you to be kinder to yourself and to others. These tips can help you cope with the range of feelings and experiences of caregiving. You can learn to see yourself and the situation differently and this can help you to respond to everyday challenges more creatively and effectively.

1. **Breathe.** Focus on your belly or chest and notice the physical feelings of breathing in and breathing out. Do this for 10 full breaths.
2. **Take more moments to pause.** Before answering your phone, take 3 breaths. You can try this while stopped at a red light in traffic, and before entering the front door of your home.
3. **Notice your food.** Take 10 seconds before you eat to pay attention to the colours, textures, smells of the food on your plate.
4. **Eat without distractions.** Eat one meal a day or week in silence without any distractions: no phone, TV, radio, reading, or computer. If this is too hard, then start by eating the first 5 minutes of your meal in silence with no distractions. It is OK to start with the first 3 bites of your meal in silence.
5. **Walk with all of your senses on.** During a walk, what colours, sounds, smells, do you notice? How does the wind or temperature feel on your skin? What kind of surface are you walking on; something hard or soft? How does it feel?

# Stay in the Moment

6. **Everyday activity with full awareness.** Do a household task such as washing the dishes, folding laundry, or gardening with your full attention and using all of your senses.
7. **Change a routine.** Changing a routine helps to break the automatic thinking and doing habits we all have. Sometimes the automatic thought or action is not the most helpful or skillful option. Some ideas to practice getting a fresh perspective include:
  - ◇ Take a new route when you go for a walk, or drive somewhere.
  - ◇ Get off a stop earlier on the TTC and walk the rest of the way.
  - ◇ Brush your teeth with the opposite hand.
  - ◇ Notice your reaction to the change. How do you feel?
8. **Do just 1 thing at a time** and pay full attention to what you are doing, right now. Using all 5 senses of sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste can help focus your attention.
9. **Get off the runaway train of thoughts.** When you notice getting lost in your thoughts, or being on auto-pilot, notice what took your attention away. Then bring your focus back to your 5 senses and the task you are doing.
10. **Practice.** A lot of repetition may be needed to bring focus and attention to the present moment. This repetition is a normal and necessary part of the process. Everybody needs to practice to stay in the moment.



# 10 Tips for Successful

Caregivers tell us that caring for someone with dementia has ups and downs. And finding the resources for the different issues important to you and your family member/friend with dementia can be challenging. Here some tips:

1. **Start early:** Get connected to resources and community services as soon as possible.
2. **Plan ahead** before crisis occurs. Prepare the groundwork today for the services you may need tomorrow.
3. **Don't do it all yourself:** Let other family members and friends help you.
4. **Turn to your health clinicians** to help with system navigation for example:
  - ◇ Reitman Centre counsellors
  - ◇ Alzheimer Society Counsellors
  - ◇ Agency social worker/case manager
  - ◇ CCAC case coordinator
5. **Make sure everybody knows about everybody**  
Provide a list of all your health care providers and services to your healthcare team.
6. **Ask, ask and ask:** The more you ask the more you know about your choices/options and the better decisions you can make for yourself and your loved one.
7. **Use as many resources and social support as possible.**

# System Navigation

8. **Keep an organized binder** with all documents and assessments to bring with you to medical appointments (Medical history, meds, etc.).
9. **When meeting with your family physician:**
  - ◇ Prepare in advance updated information about condition and services.
  - ◇ Make a list of concerns and prioritize.
  - ◇ Present your request in a simple and concise manner.
  - ◇ Be flexible, ask the physician what is realistic for you to address at each visit.
  - ◇ Suggest possible solutions/services you might be interested in.
  - ◇ Make sure to let your physician know about how you are coping too.
10. **Here are some useful numbers and links for resource information:**
  - ◇ The Reitman Centre for caregivers  
416-586-4800 ext. 5882
  - ◇ Community Care Access Centre (CCAC)  
310-CCAC (310-2222); [www.310ccac.ca](http://www.310ccac.ca)
  - ◇ Alzheimer Society First Link Program  
416-322-6560; [www.alzheimerontario.org](http://www.alzheimerontario.org)
  - ◇ Community Navigation and Access program (CNAP)  
1-877-540-6565
  - ◇ The Toronto Dementia Network  
[www.dementiatoronto.org](http://www.dementiatoronto.org)

