



Caring during a pandemic - looking after you as well as a loved one

Caring can be rewarding but also stressful at the best of times. However, since the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic, it has brought additional stresses. Day centres and face to face groups closed and people have been advised to self-isolate so their support networks have reduced.

People living with dementia have not always understood about the pandemic or the need for precautions such as wearing face masks and not being able to see loved ones. Keeping a person with dementia stimulated has become so much more difficult and can increase confusion with the person with dementia and the carers stress levels.



There are things we can do to help. Firstly, try to make sure that the carer and person with dementia has adequate diet and fluid intake. It is easy to forget about and skip meals and drinks especially in the rare hot weather we get. Small regular meals and drinks can be better than a big meal.

Work out what the person with dementia can do safely. For example, a walk in quieter times, small tasks they can do such as helping with small household chores or folding washing. Music from the person's era can help them feel good and maybe even a dance if they are able to will bring a smile to their face. Getting out the old photos can stimulate memories and conversations and you can work with them on a life story template. Some people with dementia enjoy fidgeting with things so you can get something called a fiddle blanket which Admiral Nurses sometimes have a supply of or soft toys can give some comfort for some. *See samples below.*





It can be difficult living with someone 24 hours a day even without dementia! The temptation is to get into disagreement with them and correct them especially if they are asking the same question repeatedly. Listen to them, acknowledge and talk about their feelings and try to avoid correct them. Get into their reality if you can as they cannot get into ours and enjoy a new adventure with them. If it gets too much, leave the room to give both you and the person with dementia some space if you can.

When someone is caring for a loved one, it is easy to forget about your own needs. As the old analogy goes in the days when we enjoyed travelling by plane, you need to put on your own oxygen mask before you can help others with theirs. Carers often feel guilty about doing something for themselves but in having time for themselves, they are better able to cope with their caring role. It is worth trying to have a break.

As more services start to open up, day centres can be a valuable source of stimulation and company for a person with dementia and can give the carer a much needed break. There are also a number of organisations that have carers who will come into the home to sit with the person with dementia and will try to engage them in activities when they can.. If a family member or friend offers to sit with the person, don't be afraid to say yes and accept help.

As a carer it is important not to neglect your own health and keep up with your appointments such as flu and covid vaccinations as it is better to catch any health issues sooner. Try to build in time to your week for your own interests - keep hobbies going as having that time will help you better able manage any demands of your caring role. Carers can connect with other carers and build up a support network - no one understands more than someone in a similar situation.

There are organisations such as Admiral Nurses, Dementia UK, Alzheimer's Society, Age UK and Carers Centres that support carers. Don't be afraid to pick up the phone to them as they are there to support.

Since the pandemic began, a lot of the support has been online and carers are not confident in using a computer there is always someone who will help. As more services open up face to face support such as groups, look into this.

The Recovery College, in conjunction with Admiral Nurses, delivers an online Caring in Dementia course - come along, meet others going through similar and learn more about dementia and caring.

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