

AMICA

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SENIOR LIFESTYLES

THE COMPLETE MEMORY CARE GUIDE

Resources, articles and tools to support families

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# IS IT TIME FOR MEMORY CARE?

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## **Practical tips for supporting a parent with dementia.**

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If your loved one is showing signs of dementia or Alzheimer's, you might be wondering what's next. Renowned expert Dr. Heather Palmer, National Director of Cognitive Well-Being for Amica, offers guidelines to help families decide what's right for them.

### **Safety**

"I'd be evaluating if the parent is able to go about daily life in their environment in a way that's not going to cause any harm or injury," says Dr. Palmer. Can your mom manage the stove? If not, what safety precautions can be put in place to enable her to use the kitchen, but not be in danger? "Safety factors should be considered in every room," says Dr. Palmer.

### **Wandering**

Is your parent going out at 3 a.m.? It is common for people with dementia to confuse day and night and to wander or try to leave their environment. "When a resident is feeling anxious because he believes he is late for work, our team members know how to offer support by safely redirecting and reassuring him," says Dr. Palmer.

### **Eating**

Is your parent getting proper nutrition? "Eating habits in someone with dementia can change quickly," says Dr. Palmer. They may forget to eat, have changing taste preferences or not feel hunger. Others may require ongoing prompting because of confusion around how to use utensils. At Amica, delicious daily meals prepared by chefs are served by friendly staff in a dedicated dining room designed to support people with cognitive challenges.

### **Socializing**

Research consistently points to the importance of social interaction to help slow cognitive decline. How are social opportunities being maintained for your loved one: Is someone visiting every day? Is the person seeing friends or staying home with very little interaction? It's tough to compete with a premium senior living residence, which caters to the needs of residents with a variety of engaging one-on-one and group activities.

## WARNING SIGNS OF DEMENTIA:

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1. Memory loss affecting day-to-day abilities
2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks
3. Problems with language
4. Disorientation in time and space
5. Impaired judgment

### **Hygiene**

Is your loved one able to brush their teeth, comb their hair or bathe? If they're living with a spouse, is the spouse able to help? "If not, a residence is staffed with people who are skilled at helping with those tasks," says Dr. Palmer. Instead of forcing memory care residents into a schedule, staff at Amica offer support tailored to the wishes of each resident and family. If a senior prefers to sleep until noon or relax in a candlelit bath before dinner, we will happily make those preferences happen.

## Caregiving services

Does your parent have a capable caregiver at home? If not, are you comfortable with leaving your mom alone all day? “If you’re looking at bringing in someone 24/7,” says Dr. Palmer, “the benefit is you’re keeping your parent in a familiar setting, but you need to evaluate if quality of life is being sacrificed. You’d need a very special, very skilled caregiver to compare with the level of expertise in wellness, life enrichment, fitness and dining that your parent would experience in memory care at a senior living residence.”

## Family

One of the biggest signals it’s time to move is the impact on family. Is supporting and caring for your parent becoming a significant challenge to you or your family? Is your relationship with your parent being negatively affected? “At Amica we take care of those everyday chores so the time you spend with your parent is happy and enjoyable,” says Dr. Palmer. If moving would benefit the parent with dementia, it will also benefit a spouse who may be working overtime as a primary caregiver.

## Diagnosis

“When you know there’s a diagnosis or a likelihood of decline, I personally think it’s time to start talking about the idea of moving,” says Dr. Palmer. “Too many people wait until they’re in crisis before moving to memory care. Having your parent cognitively involved in the process is always going to be better. Not only does this allow them to play a part in the decision-making, it increases the likelihood they will have the cognitive resources to learn about and adapt to their new environment.”

“I had to have tough conversations with my mom. I was worried about taking away the car or talking with her about a potential move to a seniors’ residence, but now I know it was the right thing to do. She is safe, supported and living in an environment where she can focus on improving her health with daily brain activities.”

– Cheryl, daughter of resident at Amica



# WHAT'S NEXT AFTER A DEMENTIA DIAGNOSIS?

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It can be difficult to hear that your mom or dad is living with dementia, but there's plenty that adult children can do to help support parents and preserve their independence and quality of life. Dr. Heather Palmer, Amica's National Director of Cognitive Well-Being, offers practical tips.

## Understand the diagnosis

"I can't tell you how many times someone is told they have dementia and they come to us and say it's Alzheimer's," says Dr. Palmer. In fact, Alzheimer's is one of many dementias. "Ask the doctor what type of dementia and what does the diagnosis mean?" Knowing the type — from Lewy body dementia to vascular dementia — might tell you what to expect as the disease progresses so you can better plan.

## Create a health folder

Store all information related to the diagnosis in one place, including doctors' contact info. Add a notebook to record questions and answers. Will more testing take place? Which tests and what for? What other professionals might be involved? Who will be the primary care provider? Note the dates of doctors' visits and ask how often your loved one will be monitored. Will each doctor initiate bookings or does your mother

or father need to call? Update the file and notebook at every appointment.

## Play a supporting role

While people with dementia may be in denial and lack capacity, they are still in charge of their care. They will be receiving calls and voicemails from the doctor, even if they deliberately or accidentally miss these appointments. "It can be challenging for the adult child: you may never have all the information and the doctor doesn't have to share it with you," says Dr. Palmer.

## Play to their strengths

Palmer recommends documenting your loved one's skills. "You can start to create increased independence at home simply by having a concrete approach to identifying and scheduling around strengths and weaknesses," says Palmer. If Mom forgets her medications, what is she really good at remembering and how can we tap into that to get her to remember her pills? Support her independence by developing simplified schedules she can follow, such as a calendar on the fridge reminding her to shower every Wednesday and Saturday.

## Preserve what's important

What experiences does your dad value? If he can no longer drive himself to dinner with the guys every Tuesday, can you make it a priority to take him? "If you push aside things your parent values, you'll notice a faster decline in cognitive capacity," says Dr. Palmer. Work together with your loved one and other family members to help them maintain as much choice, freedom and independence as possible."

## Have those tough conversations

Long before a parent loses capacity, discuss his or her wishes and directives for power of attorney for finance and personal care. Find out their vision for retirement living. "Start the conversation because it may take a year or two to get their head around leaving their home," says Dr. Palmer. "Eventually bring it up again, look at what's available, go on a tour and discuss the advantages of no longer having to cook and shop and do housekeeping. When it's necessary to make a move, they've been part of the decision-making."

# SAME COUPLE, DIFFERENT NEEDS

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## What can seniors do when one partner needs more care than the other?

Don used to make several trips a day to visit his wife, Barbara. She'd moved to an assisted living seniors' home in 2013 when her advanced dementia became too challenging to manage at home. But the move wasn't working for either of them: Barbara was frequently agitated. Don was getting run down trying to maintain their house and making multiple trips a day to spend time with his wife of 62 years. Everything changed for the better when the couple moved into an Amica residence offering a full continuum of care under one roof, with dedicated floors for independent living, assisted living and memory care. This way, couples with different needs can remain in the same residence, and seniors don't need to move to a new home if their care needs evolve.

Barbara lives on the memory care floor for people with dementia, which is staffed by certified, compassionate team members trained in memory-care best practices. Don has noticed she's much calmer and she likes the daily activities. "I enjoy the security of knowing that Barbara's needs are being met 24/7," says Don.

Don has a separate suite. Free from the burden of household chores, meals, commuting and caregiving, he's healthier, less stressed and enjoying spending more time with Barbara.

"Although we live on different floors, we visit several times daily and attend some activities together," he says.

Their family is also pleased with the move. They take comfort in knowing their parents' needs are being met, and now they can visit both at one convenient location. "Our lives have improved," says Don. "We are satisfied this is the best possible arrangement for us."

"I was getting run down trying to maintain the house while caring for my wife of 62 years. I was so busy that I rarely had time to spend quality time with my kids when they visited. Now I enjoy the security of knowing my wife's needs are being met 24/7 and I can visit her every day."

– Don, resident at Amica

# HOW MEMORY CARE AT AMICA SUPPORTS SENIORS WITH DEMENTIA

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Paulette Kinsella remembers when one family arrived at Amica in crisis mode: they were burned out from caring for their father, who was living with dementia and struggling at home. “After a month in a residence with memory care they said, ‘Oh my goodness, our dad is back.’ The combination of routine, regular meals, regular medication, and doing things he enjoyed gave him purpose again,” says Kinsella, a Regional Director of Wellness for Amica. Here’s how memory care supports residents and families after a dementia diagnosis.

## **Connecting to resources**

“Both the resident and the family need our help in the early stages,” says Kinsella. We put families in touch with support groups and outside agencies, such as a local chapter of the Alzheimer Society, and provide printed information to help them understand their loved one’s specific diagnosis.

## **Open communication**

Communication both ways is crucial: we encourage family members to tell our team members what they’re noticing — such as “Mom is now calling me by my aunt’s name.” In return, we will report what we’re observing and assist family on how to navigate through that phase of the disease process. “It can be a trying time because the family may be

getting concerning messages from their loved one,” says Kinsella. She saw this firsthand when her own mother-in-law, who is living with dementia, experienced anxiety while living alone; she called her family day and night to report someone was in the house or had stolen her medication — incidents that simply hadn’t happened.

## **Extra help**

Some seniors with dementia may know they’re forgetting things and grow frustrated when they realize their mistakes. We can help provide reassurance and added support behind the scenes. For example, a resident may arrive in the dining room only to discover he’s barefoot. “To save that embarrassment, we would arrange to drop by before he goes down and gently remind him about socks and shoes,” says Kinsella.

## **Comfort and reassurance**

Agitation can affect some seniors living with dementia. Amica team members are able to calm and settle our residents thanks to our unique Discovery process. We work with the families to understand what may trigger a resident to experience anxiety or agitation and support residents through the episode using family insights and our own dementia-care techniques. Our wellness staff would know that Mary feels soothed by a cup

of tea and looking through a photo album while John prefers classical music or a warm blanket. We update every resident’s Wellness Plan to incorporate new or effective ways we can provide reassurance as they progress through the disease.

## **Personalized comfort**

“Just because you have a diagnosis of dementia, it doesn’t mean you move to memory care,” says Kinsella. Many residents are safely supported in their suites in independent living with gradual assistance from our team. “We look at what’s best for the resident. We look not only at the safety of the resident, but also what continues to give them purpose and fulfillment to help them continue to get the most out of life.”

# 6 WAYS TO HOST DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY GATHERINGS

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## **Follow these tips from a memory care expert to make family get-togethers better for everyone.**

Family gatherings can create wonderful traditions and lasting memories. How can you make these get-togethers more inclusive and successful when a family member has dementia or Alzheimer's? Follow these tips offered by Dr. Heather Palmer, National Director of Cognitive Well-Being at Amica, where team members support residents as well as their families.

### **Pick a good time of day**

People with cognitive impairments such as dementia have peak times when they're most alert. "Pay attention to when Mom is at her best," says Dr. Palmer. If your parent has more focus during the day, you might try hosting a birthday lunch instead of dinner. They're more likely to be engaged, better able to cope and less likely to be tired or show behaviours. "This way, the family gets to spend time with Grandma when she's happy and laughing rather than agitated and frustrated." Consider the impact of medications on her mood or energy level and plan accordingly.

### **Consider the space**

Laughter, conversation and music are signs of a great party, but these and other sounds can be very distracting to someone with dementia. If the gathering space is large and it's too much for your parent, plan on having a second, quieter room where your father can sit while a few people go in at a time to engage with him. Be prepared to move furniture or people around if the noise bothers him.

### **Keep the family informed**

Designate one family member to take the lead on monitoring your loved one at the party. Dr. Palmer says you might consider establishing signals if Mom starts to get agitated: if the lead person raises a hand, it means the kids are too chaotic and it's time to move them. If the lead person suggests someone go for a walk, they're trying to redirect a conversation that they may see is upsetting to Dad. Let everyone know that the lead family member isn't bossing people around, they're trying to make the event pleasant for everyone.

### **Practice good communication**

Plan ahead: bring conversation topics, old stories and mementos that may help your relative reminisce, such as photographs, books, hobbies, etc. Visuals are great to support your questions and stories, but resist the temptation to ask, "Do you remember this...?" In conversation, try to simplify your language, wait for a response and don't hesitate to repeat a question. Through conversation and photos, see if you can reveal where your loved one sees herself in time. If Mom believes she's 19 and getting ready for a date, agree with her and run with it. "Live in her moment," says Dr. Palmer. "Correcting her mistakes can impact her dignity, make her lose confidence in the interaction and lead to social retreat."



# HOW TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE DEMENTIA

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If you got in the elevator with someone living with dementia, would you say something friendly or look away? “People tend to generalize any kind of cognitive challenge to be Alzheimer’s so there’s a huge stigma attached,” says Dr. Heather Palmer, Amica’s National Director of Cognitive Well-Being. “They assume and fear the worst so they don’t reach out.” Learn to connect using these tips from Amica’s renowned memory care expert.

## **#1: Accept aging in the body and mind**

When she’s making presentations about memory loss, Palmer tries to reduce the stigma associated with cognitive aging. Most of us accept that we become more physically frail as we age. “We may not like it, but we find ways to adapt, like wearing prescription glasses or getting up in the night to use the washroom,” she says. The brain is just another organ: aging brings functional changes affecting how we think. “Some of us face more physical challenges and others face more cognitive challenges caused by brain changes,” says Dr. Palmer. Yet why do we treat people differently for one and not the other? None of us have asked for any of these changes.”

## **#2: Understand some impairments caused by memory loss**

Some residents in memory care at Amica are as fit and physically capable as other seniors. They may go to exercise classes, engage in activities and outings and manage activities of daily living just as others do. “Cognitive impairment is often misunderstood, especially when someone looks and functions so well physically,” says Dr. Palmer. “It’s our job to support their cognitive well-being so they continue to get as much meaning and purpose out of life as possible.”

Age-related changes in thinking may affect memory, organization, word finding and multitasking. People with dementia may have trouble processing information, impacting their ability to understand, express their feelings and communicate in general. As a result, they may act in unconventional ways. “Try not to judge,” suggests Palmer. “All behaviours, whether positive or negative, are an expression of some kind of need. The need just may not be immediately obvious.”

## **#3: Be a good neighbour**

- Go ahead and say hello. “People assume the worst and they’re afraid. They might think, ‘That person seems happy sitting there so I’m not going to go over to talk because I might trigger a bad reaction,’”

says Dr. Palmer. “Often they choose not to interact when that very interaction could bring more meaning to that person’s life.”

- Approach from the front so you don’t startle anyone. It also helps to interact at eye level.
- Don’t talk like the person is a child but do slow down and simplify your message. Some may not be able to understand and others will.
- Support with visuals. You might use your hands to mimic the act of eating or point to a necklace while offering a compliment.
- Above all, be nice. Even if you don’t say anything, Palmer suggests starting with a big smile. “People who are cognitively compromised will pick up and absorb the feelings of those around them. If you’re friendly, showing warmth and kindness, the person may not understand what you’re saying but they will remember how your warmth made them feel good. They will likely give you a big smile back.”

# VISITING SENIORS WITH DEMENTIA

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## **How to make your visit a great source of support for someone living with Alzheimer's or another dementia.**

### **Be prepared**

Speak to team members or family to find out when your friend will be most cognitively alert: it could be over a mealtime or during an activity they enjoy. Arrive with conversation topics or old stories supported by mementoes, such as photos, an old college jacket — whatever connects you. Read about dementia in advance so you have a better understanding of what to expect from someone with age-related brain changes.

### **Focus on communication**

Pick a quiet place to meet to minimize noise and distractions. Use simple sentences, give the person time to respond and don't hesitate to prompt a senior by repeating what you said. If your friend goes off on a tangent, try to jump on board their train of thought instead of bringing them back to yours.

### **Plan for behavioral changes**

Just as no two people are alike, no two seniors with dementia will behave exactly the same. Some may act giddy, flirty, playful, elated, confused, scared, childlike,

unmotivated, anxious, sad or distant. You may see the person crying, pacing, fidgeting or acting like there's a pressing need to go somewhere or do something. Don't feel insulted by unusual behaviours, such as if you've come all this way and your loved one is talking about leaving (exit-seeking can be common). If you're nervous, check in with a team member upon arrival at an Amica residence to find out if there's anything you need to know about challenging behaviours, and how you might handle any that arise.

### **Time to connect**

Engage in an activity or conversation that taps into your friend's past. It's helpful for seniors with Alzheimer's or a related dementia to have someone with whom to reminisce and share memories. Using touch and nonverbal reassurances can help make conversations more interactive and meaningful. From a cognitive perspective, your visit is helping nurture and strengthen the brain. "Conversing, engaging, digging from the past and incorporating it into conversation is one of the best brain exercises you can get," says Dr. Heather Palmer, Amica's National Director of Cognitive Well-Being. "There's a good chance the person won't remember you, your visit or the conversations you had, but

they will remember how it made them feel," Palmer says. "Even if you're just smiling and holding hands, seniors benefit from that on so many levels."

# IT STARTS WITH A PLAN

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## **Let us help you take the next step**

Five steps for progress

1. Print and share the tools outlined in this guide to help start the conversation with your family.
2. Learn about the residences that fit the needs of your loved one.
3. Book a visit and start the comparison process.
4. Understand the level of care needed. If your situation is complex, sit down with one of our care specialists to develop a tailored plan.
5. Define a roadmap for the future. We're here to support you in making the right decision.

**Find your residence at [amica.ca](https://amica.ca)**