LOOKING AFTER SOMEONE WITH DEMENTIA DURING THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

5 key messages for carers

The coronavirus outbreak has placed a strain on everyone, but especially those of us who are caring for someone living with dementia. Here are some simple tips aimed at helping to make things more manageable. Everyone's situation is different so some of the tips may be more or less helpful depending on your circumstances.

Stay safe and well

Follow Government guidance on staying well, including the specific guidance for carers on the Carers UK website. Make a plan for what to do if you become ill, and think about who you can talk to if you start to feel overwhelmed.

Stay connected

Keep in regular contact with friends and family and encourage the person you care for to do the same.

Keep a sense of purpose

Make a list of jobs and pleasurable activities and create a daily routine that you enjoy. This could be keeping up hobbies or rediscovering old ones.

Stay active

Stay active in ways that you enjoy. Get some daily exercise outdoors if you can, or indoors if not.

Stay positive

The current situation is likely to make the pressures and frustrations of being a carer even more difficult. Don't try to struggle on alone. Ask for support if you need it, and try to make time for yourself.

We will get through this, and we will be together again.

Read on for more suggestions...

STAYING SAFE AND WELL

- The first and most important thing is to keep yourself and the person you care for safe and well. There's lots of Government guidance on how to do this, including carer-specific advice on the Carers UK website.
- Make a plan in case you get ill, including the kinds of care and support that are required and contact details of people who can help – and remember to update it when required.
- Think about who you can talk to if things become too much, whether that's friends or family, or someone at Carers UK or your local Council's adult social care service.

- Put signs around the house to remind the person you care for about safety precautions, including staying home and regular hand washing. It may help to 'model' safety measures too, for instance by commenting when you are washing your own hands.

If you don't live together

- **Think about ways that technology can help. This might include a pendant alarm, or a camera system that connects to a smartphone app. You can also arrange for food and medicine deliveries online with specific time slots. Your local Council may have a community volunteer group that can help too.**

STAYING CONNECTED

- Keep in regular contact with friends and family. Make a list of people to call and when to call them. Don't forget you can still have a chat with neighbours from a safe distance. You can also meet with someone from outside your household now, as long as they are on their own and you stay 2m apart.
- Join a telephone friendship service such as Age UK Call in Time. If you have a smart phone, groups such as WhatsApp can be a good way of keeping in touch. Similarly, you could find online groups and discussion forums that interest you.

STAYING CONNECTED (CONTINUED)

- Help the person you support to stay in contact with others through phone calls, letters, email or video calls. Chat about the important people in their life and get out photographs you can look at and display.
- Reassure them that they are safe and well and reminisce about their life and times.

If you don't live together

- **Stay in touch however you can and encourage other friends and family to do the same. It may help to create a rota so they have regular contact throughout the day.**
- **There may be others who can offer social contact from a distance, such as neighbours, members of their faith community or another trusted community group. Just be aware that introducing new people could be confusing for the person you care for.**

KEEPING A SENSE OF PURPOSE

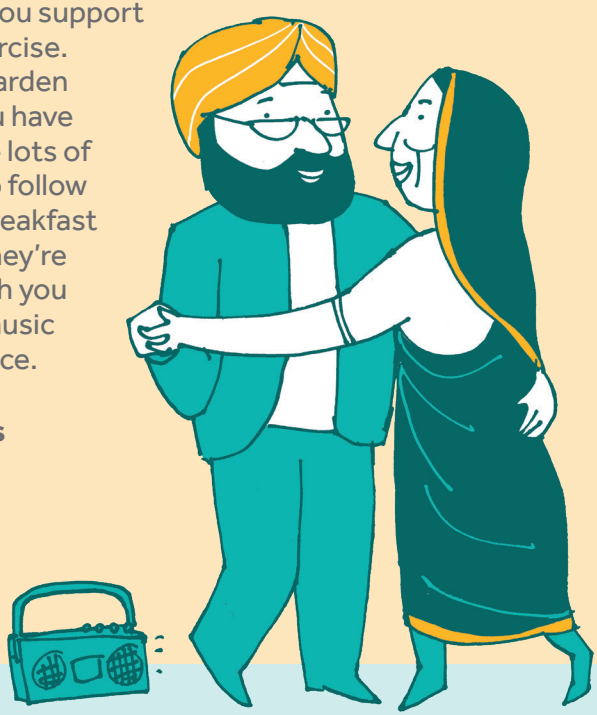
- Make a plan of things to do each day. Divide your day up into shorter periods and plan your activities – these could be familiar things or new discoveries. Alternate chores with more fun activities.
- A calendar or whiteboard can be a handy way of helping you both remember what you have planned.
- Tackle household jobs that you've been putting off and tick them off your 'to do' list. You could even give yourself a little reward, like a soak in the bath or something nice to eat.
- Try 're-discovering' things in your home, noticing pictures and ornaments and talking about how you came to have them, revisiting books or music that you've enjoyed, or playing jigsaw puzzles or board games.
- Plan your favourite TV or radio programmes into your daily schedule, and check on-demand services for things you or they might enjoy.

If you don't live together

- **Encourage the person you care for to try some of the things suggested above. Calling in the evenings will allow you to ask what they are planning for the next day, make suggestions and remind them of things like deliveries. Regular calls from you or others can break up the day, and help prompt them to start new activities.**

STAYING ACTIVE

- Make sure you get enough exercise. Go outside for a walk everyday if you can, or find ways you can exercise indoors. Don't overdo it though – warm up and warm down before and after each session and gradually build up the duration and intensity.
- Help the person you support to get regular exercise. Pottering in the garden can be ideal, if you have one, but there are lots of gentle routines to follow online or on TV breakfast programmes. If they're fit and well enough you could put some music on and have a dance.



If you don't live together

- **Encourage them to be active in whatever way is safe and enjoyable. If you can talk via video link you could share your own exercise session. Older people often respond better to much younger people and the sense of fun they bring, so involve any grandchildren if you can.**

STAYING POSITIVE

- It can be difficult to be a carer at the best of times, but now more than ever you need to try and stay positive. Doing this, and helping the person you care for do the same, will help to get you both through this difficult time. This is easier said than done, though, so if you are struggling speak to someone you know, or call Carers UK or your local Council's adult social care team.
- If you're worried about money you can find information on benefits and how to claim at www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/financial-support/help-with-benefits and www.gov.uk/carers-uk.

STAYING POSITIVE (CONTINUED)

- Try and build enjoyable activities into each day, and anticipate more difficult times of the day, such as when the person you care for tends to become agitated or upset, or when you feel low. Try to find a constructive diversion and create time for yourself.
- Many people find relaxation and mindfulness exercises helpful in managing how they feel – you'll find lots of simple guides to get started online.

If you don't live together

- **You can help the person you care for stay positive by reassuring them that the current situation is temporary, and encouraging them to talk about how they are feeling. You can also download a copy of our other leaflet which outlines five key messages for people living with dementia during Covid-19: http://www.idealproject.org.uk/covid/**

Getting information you can trust

Having reliable sources of information is essential. You can access regular updates from the BBC on the TV or radio, and if you want to speak to someone you can call:

- Carers UK **0808 808 7777**
- Alzheimer's Society Dementia Connect support line **0333 150 3456**
- Dementia UK Admiral Nurse dementia helpline **0800 888 6678**
- For NHS health advice call **111** (or visit **www.111.nhs.uk**)

If you are online, you can also access lots more useful information from reliable websites:

- **Carers UK** www.carersuk.org
- **Alzheimer's Society** www.alzheimers.org.uk
- **Dementia UK** www.dementiauk.org (email **helpline@dementiauk.org**)
- **Age UK** www.ageuk.org.uk / Age Cymru www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru
- **The NHS** www.nhs.uk
- **The Government** www.gov.uk / www.gov.wales
- **Public Health England** www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england
- **Your local council**

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Alzheimer's Society

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