

Activities of Daily Living & Other Problems

Moving & handling



If the person you are looking after has dementia, you will want to do everything you can to ensure that they remain as healthy and mobile as possible. Eventually however, they may need help with standing and moving around. Each person is different and responds to situations in their own way but here are some suggestions which you may find helpful.

Keeping mobile

It is important to encourage the person to exercise regularly and to be active in doing things for themselves, as far as possible, in order to stay fit. This will not only improve their quality of life, it will make caring less physically exhausting for you, and less tiring at an emotional level.

Walking and other forms of movement will help to prevent joint stiffness, muscle wasting and bone softening as well as improving the circulation and promoting a general feeling of well-being.

As the dementia progresses you may need to use more ingenuity in persuading the person to exercise and remain active and you may need to give them greater assistance in moving around. An occupational therapist or physiotherapist can advise on suitable exercises for people at all stages of dementia and on the safest ways of supporting the person to move around.

To find an occupational therapist ask the GP, public health nurse or hospital consultant to refer the person. The GP or public health nurse can refer them to a community physiotherapist, if there is one in your area, or you could ask to speak to a hospital physiotherapist if the person is attending a hospital or day hospital.

Cooperation

- It is essential to gain the person's cooperation, whether you are physically assisting them to move or simply suggesting that they should do so.
- Try to approach the person in a calm, relaxed way even if you are feeling very harassed. You are far more likely to be successful if the person does not feel anxious or rushed.
- Eliminate distractions such as television or radio as far as possible.
- Spend time explaining what you would like the person to do, such as getting up from the chair or putting on their coat. Even if they cannot understand what you say, the sound of your voice and the expression on your face can help to reassure them.
- If necessary, you can then break down the action into small steps, offering suitable encouragement such as, 'Now put your hand here. That's right'.
- You may be able to find other ways of communicating, such as by demonstrating an action yourself or by guiding their movements gently.
- If the person seems unwilling to cooperate, it is often better to leave them a little while, if you can, and then try again. Attempting to help someone to move who is unwilling to do so, is more likely to cause you physical strain.

Safety

- If the person with dementia is moving about or if you are helping them to move, make sure the area is clear and safe.
- Loose rugs, slippery floors, trailing flexes, wobbly furniture or obstacles are a hazard for anyone, but are particularly dangerous for someone who is confused and perhaps unsteady on their feet, and for the person supporting them.
- There is no need for clinical tidiness, if that is not what the person is used to, but make sure there is no clutter on the floors or stairs where either of you could trip.
- Make sure that neither of you is wearing footwear with poor grip or support.
- Take special care when you are feeling tired as that is when accidents are most likely to occur.

Aids and Adaptations.

Some aids and adaptations may make it easier for the person with dementia to move and for you to assist them. Ask an occupational therapist to visit and advise on the possibility of rails and other aids to help the person get in and out of the bath, on and off the toilet or round the house, or on walking aids, if these are appropriate. The occupational therapist can also suggest ways of raising the height of a chair or bed, for example, or of rearranging the furniture to make it easier for you to assist the person to move.

Advice on handling

You should never attempt to carry anyone unassisted as you could severely damage yourself and harm the person. Even supporting someone who is very heavy or dependent can be risky, unless you are very careful. That is why it is so important to ask for advice on the safest ways to handle and support the person from an occupational therapist or physiotherapist. If you do have to lift someone, make sure you get help.

- Both of you should keep your feet apart and firmly on the ground when lifting. Bend at the knees and hips and keep the back straight at all times. Keep close to the person. Tell them what you want them to do.



- Always take your time and never take the other person's weight till you are absolutely comfortable.
- Lifting and twisting can damage your back. Avoid twisting movements by rearranging furniture or taking things in easy stages.
- Always avoid pulling the person up by their arms as this could hurt or injure their shoulders.



Helping the person out of a chair

It can be more difficult to get up from a low chair. If the chair is too low ideally replace it with a higher chair with firm arms which will help the person stay independent for longer. A cushion on the seat might help also.

The person should be encouraged to move to the edge of the chair and encouraged/assisted to put their feet under them to allow them to push into a standing position and stand without losing their balance.

You should stand at the side of the chair facing the person and encourage them to put both hands on the chair. You should place one arm behind the person's lower back and the other on the front of the person's shoulders.

Using a command like 'Ready Steady Stand' you should encourage the person to lean forwards with their nose over their toes and to push themselves into a stand. Remember to bend your hips and knees and keep your back straight.

Note: If this is proving very difficult, it may be time to consult a Physiotherapist/Occupational Therapist who will advise on equipment that might help.



Helping the person out of bed

If the person needs help to get out of bed it would be beneficial to the carer if the person was in a height adjustable bed as the lower the bed the more strain is placed on the carers back. An occupational therapist can also supply special legs to put a divan bed to make it higher.

- You should assist the person to roll onto their side, encourage them to bring their knees towards their tummy and have their feet out over the edge of the bed. The person should be encouraged/assisted to use their hands to help push them to a sitting position.
- You should stand with a broad base facing the person with your hips and knees bent and your back straight and place your hands one on each shoulder.
- Using a command such as 'Ready, Steady, Sit' the person should help to push themselves into sitting as you assist them.

Note: If the person cannot assist with this, you should seek the assistance of a Physiotherapist /Occupational Therapist who will advise you on equipment that will help.

Helping someone up from the floor

Dealing with a person who falls while you are assisting them or a person who has fallen is a very high risk situation especially for the carer as the risk of back injury is considerable.

Prevention is better than cure so always be sure that the person is fit to walk before you bring them for a walk. If the person should go to fall when you are assisting them, you should guide them to the floor rather than attempt to hold them up.

If the person has fallen to the ground, make sure first that they are not injured. If you think they have been hurt, make them comfortable, keep them warm and call for help. If they are not injured, you may assist them provided that you are confident the person can do most of the move themselves so that you are there to assist rather than lift them.

- Encourage the person to roll over onto their side and bring their knees to their tummy before getting them to get on their hands and knees.
- Place a chair in front of them and get them to lean their forearms on the chair. Instruct the person to bend up one knee and place their foot firmly on the ground.
- Finally instruct the person to tuck in the toes of their back foot and push into standing.
- A second chair can be put behind the patient so that they only have to pushup enough to sit back on the chair behind them.

