

# Moving and Handling

## A guide for family carers



Alzheimer National Helpline

**1800 341 341**

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. Safe moving and handling are an important aspect of caring for people living with dementia.

This factsheet is a guide for family carers.

A person living with dementia may need help with activities such as walking, standing up from their chair, going upstairs or downstairs, moving around the bathroom, and turning or moving around in bed. When they want to do any of these actions, encourage them to do as much as they can themselves. It will help to keep their muscles supple and prevent stiffness in their joints.

### Why does dementia affect a person's ability to move around?

- Dementia affects the way a person can process information. It takes longer for messages in the brain to get around.
- Dementia can reduce a person's ability to carry out routine activities.
- People living with dementia can have impaired eyesight and spatial awareness (the sense of how near or far away something is). Coping with gradual sight loss can affect their mental abilities, mobility and day-to-day activities.
- Some types of dementia can affect a person's coordination and balance.
- In the later stages of dementia, people are likely to become much frailer. They may struggle to understand or follow simple instructions or commands. They are more likely to remain sitting in one place, which can lead to greater stiffness and more chance of developing pressure sores.

- Dementia can affect people in different ways. Its effects can vary from hour to hour and day to day. The amount of help and support you need to give them will vary too.
- Repetitive strain injuries and lower back injuries are commonly reported by carers, so you must remember to take care of yourself too.

From time to time, Family Carers Ireland runs a Patient Moving and Handling course. Places are limited. Visit their website for information:  
[www.familycarers.ie](http://www.familycarers.ie)

### Co-operation

It is essential that the person living with dementia agrees and co-operates with what you are doing. The following tips may help you gain their co-operation.

- Approach them in a calm, relaxed way, with a smile, and take the time to explain what you're doing. Try to make eye contact with them. Even if they do not understand what you are saying, they're likely to find the tone of your voice and your expression reassuring. You may be able to explain what you want them to do in other ways – by demonstrating the action yourself, for example.
- You may need to encourage the person to complete an action once they have started. It might help to say something like 'That's right, hold on to the rail' or 'You're nearly there now'.



## Moving and Handling

1800 341 341

- Eliminate distractions. For example, turn off the radio or TV.
- If the person is unwilling to co-operate, leave them for a while if you can. Attempting to help an unwilling person to move is more likely to cause you physical strain.
- If you are using an aid, such as a hoist or sliding sheet, tell the person with dementia what you are doing. Keep them informed and reassure them throughout the whole process.
- You may need to approach every task as if it is the first time you've done it for the person living with dementia.
- Remember: changes in how you or they communicate can be upsetting and frustrating for everyone.
- If appropriate, break the action down into smaller steps, so you can instruct the person how to do it one movement at a time.

For more information on communication, see our Communication factsheet. This is available to download from our website or by post by contacting our helpline on **1800 341 341** or [helpline@alzheimer.ie](mailto:helpline@alzheimer.ie).

## Contact a healthcare professional

If you are struggling with moving and handling, you can contact your GP or public health nurse. They can arrange an appointment with an occupational therapist (OT), who can advise on aids and equipment to help with moving and handling. There is normally a waiting list to see a community OT. For a list of registered private OTs, visit [www.aoti.ie](http://www.aoti.ie)

For a list of suppliers of aids and equipment in Ireland, please go to <https://alzheimer.ie/get-support/equipment-adaptions-and-technology/suppliers-of-products-and-devices/>

**Factsheet:** C11 **First Published:** January 2022

**Revised by:** Amanda Keane, Information and Helpline Officer, Alzheimer Society of Ireland and Gemma O'Donnell, Dementia Adviser, Alzheimer Society of Ireland. Many thanks to our Irish Dementia Working Group & our Dementia Carers Campaign Network for their contribution to this factsheet.

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI) has taken great care to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this factsheet. ASI is not liable for any inaccuracies, errors, omissions or misleading information.

## Do's and don'ts when moving a person living with dementia (PLWD)

### DO

- ✓ Ensure you are both wearing appropriate footwear
- ✓ Get them to do as much as possible for themselves
- ✓ Allow plenty of time
- ✓ Try to make eye contact
- ✓ Speak to an occupational therapist or physiotherapist about aids that can help with task
- ✓ Break the task down into smaller steps
- ✓ Ensure there is adequate lighting and there are no hazards you or the person living with dementia

### DON'T

- ✗ Attempt to move the without explaining what you are doing
- ✗ Try to lift or carry the person with dementia
- ✗ Allow them to wrap their arms around your neck when stand up
- ✗ Pull a person up by their arms or under their armpits can cause injury to them and you
- ✗ Buy aids or equipment without speaking to an occupational therapist first.

## For further information & support

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland National Helpline is a free and confidential service providing information about dementia, support and services in your area and about living well day to day.

**Helpline 1800 341 341** (free calls from landlines and mobiles) Monday to Friday 10am-5pm, Saturday 10am-4pm

**Livechat** on the website [www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ie) Monday to Friday 10am-11am and 3pm-5pm Saturday 10am-1pm

**Email** [helpline@alzheimer.ie](mailto:helpline@alzheimer.ie)  
**Website** [www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ie)

