



# CARE INSTRUCTIONS

KAISER PERMANENTE

## Caring for a Person With Dementia

### Your Kaiser Permanente Care Instructions

Dementia is a loss of mental skills that affects daily life. Alzheimer's disease is a form of dementia. Strokes and diseases such as Parkinson's disease can also lead to dementia.

Dementia can cause problems with memory, thinking clearly, and planning. It is different for everyone, but it usually gets worse slowly. Some people who have dementia can function well for a long time. But at some point it may become hard for the person to care for himself or herself.

It is upsetting to find out that a loved one has dementia. You may be afraid and worried about what will happen and how you will care for the person. Although there is no cure for dementia, medicine can slow memory loss and improve thinking for a while. Medicines can also help the person sleep or cope with depression or behavior changes.

The Alzheimer's Association offers good information and support for people with dementia and their families. If you are caring for someone with dementia, you can help make life safer and more comfortable. You can also help your loved one make decisions about future care wishes. You may also want to bring up legal and financial issues. These are difficult but important conversations to have.

### How can you care at home for someone with dementia?

#### Taking care of the person

- If the person takes medicines for dementia, help him or her take them exactly as prescribed. Call the doctor or other clinician if you think the person is having a problem with medicines. We need to speak with you to decide together the next steps in finding the best solution for the person.
- Make a list of the person's medicines. Review it with all of his or her doctors or other clinicians.

## Caring for a Person With Dementia (page 2)

- Help the person eat healthy foods. Serve plenty of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables every day. If the person is not hungry, try giving him or her snacks or nutritional drinks such as Boost, Ensure, or Sustacal.
- Encourage physical activity such as walking. Help the person stay active mentally through reading, crossword puzzles, or other hobbies.
- If the person has trouble sleeping, suggest that he or she avoid naps in the afternoon. Offer a glass of warm milk or caffeine-free herbal tea before bedtime.
- Develop a routine. The person will feel less frustrated or confused with a clear, simple plan of what to do every day. Tell the person in advance if there will be any changes to his or her schedule.
- Be patient. A task may take the person longer than it used to.
- Offer emotional support. Talk about problems the person is having. Listen, include the person in conversations, and treat him or her with respect.
- For as long as he or she is able, allow the person to make decisions about activities, food, clothing, and other choices. The person will want to be independent, even if tasks take more time or are not done perfectly. Tailor tasks to the person's abilities. For example, if cooking is no longer safe, ask for help in setting the table, making simple dishes such as a salad, or shopping. When the person needs help, offer it gently.

### Staying safe

- Make the home safe. Tack down rugs, put no-slip tape in the tub, use handrails, and put safety switches on stoves and appliances. Keep rooms uncluttered, with clear walkways around furniture. Do not move furniture around. This can confuse the person.
- Use locks on doors and cupboards. Lock up knives, scissors, medicines, cleaning supplies, and other dangerous things.
- Do not let the person drive or cook if he or she cannot do it safely.
- Get medical alert jewelry for the person so that you can be contacted if he or she wanders away. If possible, provide a safe place for wandering, such as an enclosed yard or garden.

## Caring for a Person With Dementia (page 3)

### Taking care of yourself

- Ask your doctor or other clinician about support groups and resources in your area. The Alzheimer's Association is a good source of information and support for people with dementia and their families.
- Take care of your health. Be sure to eat healthy foods and get enough rest and exercise.
- Take time for yourself. Respite services provide someone to stay with the person for a short time while you get out of the house for a few hours.
- Make time for an activity that you enjoy—reading, listening to music, painting or doing crafts, playing an instrument—even if you can do it for only a few minutes a day.
- Share tasks with family and friends, especially ones that are hard for you. Ask for help if you need it.
- Spend time with family, friends, and others in your support system.
- At some point, you may not be able to care for your loved one at home. Look into the options for full-time or long-term care before you need it.

**Follow-up care is a key part of the person's treatment and safety.** As a partner in the person's health care, you can do things like keep all scheduled visits, be sure you know the results of all tests and labs ordered as part of his or her care, and keep an up-to-date list of the medicines the person is taking. Know how to contact us between visits, and call your doctor or other clinician if the person's problems get worse.

### When should you call 911?

**If you think the person who has dementia is experiencing a medical emergency, call 911 immediately or seek other emergency services.** Examples of symptoms that may be an emergency include:

- The person who has dementia wanders away and you cannot find him or her.
- The person who has dementia is seriously injured.

### When should you call Kaiser Permanente?

- The person suddenly sees things that are not there (hallucinates).
- The person has a sudden change in his or her behavior.

## Caring for a Person With Dementia (page 4)

- The person has symptoms that could cause injury.
- The person has problems with his or her medicine.
- You need more information to care for a person with dementia.
- You need respite care so you can take a break.
- You feel you are losing control of your feelings and the situation.

### How can you learn more about dementia?

- *Log on:* [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org). Search for **dementia** in the **Health encyclopedia**.
- *Listen to:* Kaiser Permanente Healthphone: 1-800-332-7563. For a list of topics, go to [members.kp.org](http://members.kp.org) and search for **healthphone**.

*Your Kaiser Permanente Care Instructions adapted from Healthwise, Incorporated © 2006. All rights reserved.*