



How to look after yourself - for older people living with dementia or mental health needs and their carers

This information has been compiled in association with the Faculty of Psychology of Older People and drawn from organisations such as Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project, Age UK Alzheimer's Society and Russ Harris Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

As well as considering the suggestions below, we wish to emphasise that the communities of older people nationwide are known to be the most resourceful across situations of hardship and challenge. Please ask for their advice on how to manage at home alone. Please ask for their advice about how to maintain resilience in difficult situations. Do think about the abundance of advice, experience, mindset and knowledge that these individuals have. This is a time to benefit from the wisdom of older people.

For older people

- Fear can be helpful and lead us to take actions to keep us safe. However, sometimes it can be difficult to cope and think logically when our fear reaches high levels. There is a lot of misinformation out there. Facts dispel fear – try to follow advice from the NHS or public health guidance rather than social media formats.
- Try to focus on what you can control. We can't control what is going to happen in the future, but we can control our own behaviour.
- Go back to things you've done in past that you found helpful to reduce anxiety. This will be different for everyone but could include gardening, exercise or telephoning a friend.
- Maintain your routine as much as possible at home. This means you will still be completing self-care activities such as bathing or showering even if you are not going out and so it makes your routine feel more 'normal.'
- Exercise is very important for our mental and physical health. If you are able to take a walk round your garden, then do so. You could also access exercise videos online, or you could try an exercise DVD.

- Try to maintain a healthy diet, with lots of fruit and vegetables. Many supermarkets have now dedicated hours to support older or vulnerable people with accessing and purchasing their shopping.
- Stay hydrated- this means having around 2 litres of water per day.
- If you have access to a garden (providing you are able to maintain some physical distance to others) try to get some time outside, especially when there is some sunshine.

Novel Ways to Spend Your Time

- There is a telephone app called 'Next Door' where people in your neighbourhood may be offering support.
- Some museums are now offering virtual museum tours; you can access these by searching online for: <https://artsandculture.google.com/>
- If you have access to the internet, you can stream classical music online. Many operas and theatres are also now available to stream online too. You could search for some of these by visiting the website operavision.eu, or search on YouTube.com for 'Opera on the Sofa' or 'The London Symphony Orchestra'.
- You could set up your own book or film club by organising a group or even just one friend where you arrange to watch or read something and then discuss it over the phone. If you are more comfortable online, there are some clubs available for you to access there, such as the 'Travelling Symphony Movie Club', which you can search on the internet.
- Rest! It's also okay to spend some well-earned time resting and watching some films you enjoy.

Community Support

Sharing your number

If you don't feel comfortable with technology, the use of a pen and paper to share a telephone number can still be positively distributed. Consequently, the sense of feeling secure, by knowing that your neighbour is available to collect a prescription or collect groceries is imperative to maintaining an existing positive ethos.

Be prepared. Think about other things it would be useful to prepare, this may include:

- Keeping to hand a list of useful telephone numbers
- Having a list of your medications and important medical information to hand

Care and support:

- Your care and support should continue even if you are advised to self-isolate
- You might experience some changes to your normal services, such as seeing different care workers or receiving visits at different times of day

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 6565. Free, confidential information and guidance, 8am to 7pm, 365 days a year.

What to do if you are feeling overwhelmed (by Russ Harris)

Fear is a natural response when we are confronted with challenging situations which are uncertain.

However sometimes our thoughts can start to spin out of our control and can become unhelpful or not useful to us.

At these times, it can help to come back to the present:

Firstly - focus on what is in your control. We cannot control the coronavirus, we cannot control decision making about it or how we feel about it. But we can control what we do about it (our behaviour). The more we focus on what we can do, in the here and now, the more we can make a difference to how ourselves and the people around us.

How to do this- follow ACE

A = Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings

Silently and kindly acknowledge whatever is 'showing up' inside you: thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories, sensation, urges. Take the stance of a curious scientist, observing what's going on in your inner world.

And while continuing to acknowledge your thoughts and feelings, also:

C = Come back into your body

Come back into and connect with your physical body. Find your own way of doing this. You could try some or all of the following, or find your own methods:

- Slowly pushing your feet hard into the floor.

- Slowly straightening up your back and spine; if sitting, sitting upright and forward in your chair.
- Slowly pressing your fingertips together
- Slowly stretching your arms or neck, shrugging your shoulders.
- Slowly breathing

E = Engage in what you're doing

Get a sense of where you are and refocus your attention on the activity you are doing.

Find your own way of doing this. You could try some or all of the following suggestions, or find your own methods:

- Look around the room and notice 5 things you can see.
- Notice 3 or 4 things you can hear.
- Notice what you can smell or taste or sense in your nose and mouth
- Notice what you are doing
- End the exercise by giving your full attention to the task or activity at hand. (And if you don't have any meaningful activity to do, see the next 3 steps.)

Ideally, run through the ACE cycle slowly 3 or 4 times, to turn it into a 2- 3 minute exercise.

Then come back to what matters to you and the people you live with or connect with e.g. over the phone

What matters to you? What do you like to engage in?

You may want to consider physical exercise to stay fit, cooking (as) healthy food (as possible, given restrictions), and doing meaningful activities by yourself or with others. Repeatedly throughout the day, ask yourself 'What can I *do* right now - no matter how small it may be - that improves life for myself or others I live with, or people in my community?' And whatever the answer is – do it, and engage in it fully.

How to help people living with dementia remember Coronavirus and what they need to do

1. Use posters and reminders in the house. Pictures and words are best. Put them on the doors, next to the sink and in places that are regularly passed. Point out the poster and make a clear statement "We need to wash our hands"

2. Keep communication as clear as possible and try to focus on what you need to do rather than why you must do it.
3. Tell the person you care for that this is advice from a person they trust – maybe the GP, their children, the government so they understand this isn't your choice.
4. Use your digital devices to set reminders – "It's time to wash your hands" "It's time to phone a friend"
5. Link washing hands with a song, music or story. Pay close attention to details such as how the water feels, the smell of the soap and memories linked to times when you wash hands (work, school, hospitals)
6. People with dementia, at all stages of difficulty, will pick up on anxiety and panic. Be aware that you may be anxious too. Breathe through your own anxiety and try to stay calm. Be matter of fact and upbeat.
7. Limit access to the news, radio and conversations about covid-19 and the risks. This heightens anxiety and is hard to explain
8. Prioritise getting on well if you can, behaviours are easier to change if you keep the mood light and encourage.
9. Encourage family and friends to maintain regular phone and digital contact and ask them to explain that they are washing hands, keeping their distance, staying at home. We are all doing this together.
10. Keep busy in the house as much as possible and if you need a break to go out, use the garden or make a plan to sit and look out of the window.
11. Use your local community well. Explain to neighbours that the person you care for may not remember the guidance and that they need to contact you if they are talking a walk outside. Remind everyone that this is not breaking rules it's simply not remembering.
12. If possible, set up different areas around your home so that you can move from activity to activity: watch favourite films and musicals in the living room. Listen to the radio in the kitchen. Do jigsaw puzzles at the table. If you can, take walks around the garden
13. Try and arrange repeat prescriptions to be delivered or again, to be picked up by family and friends
14. Staying physically active during this time will help to keep you mentally and physically well
15. See what their social network is like, can they keep in contact with others, for the most part this will not be in person, talking to others generally helps put things in perspective
16. Can they help and support others, this can be really important for them (plus ensures we are doing something valuable too)
17. Focus on what they can control, what are they doing well they can build on
18. Can you get them to have some break from COVID 19: ensuring they don't listen to the news all day long or have it on in the background
19. If you can, it might be an idea to identify two "flu friends" who you can call on
20. It is possible that the person you care for will become suspicious about the advice and the isolation. Reassure them that they are safe at home and keep in mind a list of activities, songs, conversations and interests that you can use quickly to maintain their wellbeing.

21. Those with dementia can easily develop a delirium. Pay close attention to changes in levels of confusion or unusual behaviour. Seek medical advice if you think they are showing symptoms -NHS 111 or phone the GP/CPN
22. Use the Herbert Protocol with your local Police force. This lets them know all about the person you care for and allows for quick action if they go missing. Find more information by calling your local Police station or calling Age UK
23. “Having a plan in place can help ease your worries if you are not able to care for those you look after at any point in the future” Carers UK <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/practical-support/planning-for-emergencies> Lots of other advice here.
24. The National Activity Providers Association are currently providing free access to their website for ideas and Activities in the home NAPPA - <http://nappa-activities.co.uk/membership/free-resources>
25. Dementia UK also has good advice <https://www.dementiauk.org> with a helpline number 0800 8886678.
26. Please do ask for help. Contact your local Alzheimer’s Society or Age UK team for a conversation. Link with friends and look after yourself.

How to help people living with dementia stay well

For all of us, but founded on the needs of people living with dementia, are the following essential psychological needs:

Love, Comfort, Attachment, Inclusion, Occupation and Identity

Love

Everybody needs love and acceptance. We can probably all think of times when we feel love whether this is loving a person, enjoying an activity, having a favourite meal or self-love. Having to self-isolate may make it harder for us to do the things that make us feel love or loved, as we can’t see the people we usually see or access activities we usually engage in. You could think about making a photo album with pictures of all the people you care about so you can look at them whenever you want to. How about adding in stories of times you have enjoyed together? Make sure you look after yourself, and maybe spoil yourself a bit; get your favourite food in, listen to your favourite music, sit in the garden and enjoy nature.

Comfort

We all need our basic needs met including our emotional need to not feel anxious. It is natural that with all the news about the COVIT-19 virus and feelings of uncertainty we might feel more anxious than usual. There are lots of ways we can control our anxiety. It might be useful to limit the amount of time we spend watching the news – they are lots of confusing messages out there that can increase anxiety. Some people find that practicing mindfulness, or trying relaxation techniques help with anxiety. A lot of people now enjoy

mindfulness colouring to give them something to focus on rather than thinking of what is going on in the world that we can't control

Occupation

Routine and structure in your day are likely to help in maintaining activity during this time. Maintain your routine as much as possible at home. This means you will still be completing self-care activities such as bathing or showering even if you are not going out and so it makes your routine feel more 'normal'

Inclusion

It is important to be a part of something.

Phone calls or whatsapp groups

For those of you who have mobile phones, why not download the whats app application and set up group chats with your friends, family and neighbours!

For those of you who do not, don't forget that self-isolation is not complete isolation.

Pick up the phone, call your friends and family regularly. Perhaps even set up set-time calls to your nearest and dearest at a convenient time for all.. for example 12pm just before lunch, or 6pm after work just before tea.

Dementia diaries

If you are someone living with dementia you may want to connect digitally through Dementia Engagement Empowerment Project. You may want to become a dementia diarists or to listen to what others people with a dementia are doing, learning and sharing.

Connect with others virtually maybe through <https://dementiadiaries.org>

Social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, have been displaying fantastic acts of support for older adults concerning the difficulties caused by the Coronavirus. For example:

- The hashtag "[#SelfisolationHelp](#)" became popular, with people using it to offer assistance and run errands for older adults who have been asked to self-isolate
- Supermarkets have introduced dedicated shopping hours for the elderly
- Live group online streams to bring people together online. For example, cook along together, exercise together, wellbeing exercises together
- Creating an endless online community, giving older adults who are quarantining an accessible platform to 'join in' with others and truly realise they are NOT ALONE!