

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Tips for Dementia Caregivers

Most likely, dementia does not increase risk for COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the new coronavirus, just like dementia does not increase risk for the flu. However, dementia-related behaviors, increased age and common health conditions that often accompany dementia may increase risk.

For example, people with Alzheimer's disease and all other dementia may forget to wash their hands or take other recommended precautions to prevent illness. In addition, diseases like COVID-19 and the flu may worsen cognitive impairment due to dementia.

Tips for dementia caregivers at home

Caregivers of individuals living with Alzheimer's and all other dementia should follow guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and consider the following tips:

- For people living with dementia, increased confusion is often the first symptom of any illness. If a person living with dementia shows rapidly increased confusion, contact your health care provider for advice. Unless the person is having difficulty breathing or a very high fever, it is recommended that you call your health care provider instead of going directly to an emergency room. Your doctor may be able to treat the person without a visit to the hospital.
- People living with dementia may need extra and/or written reminders and support to remember important hygienic practices from one day to the next.
 - Consider placing signs in the bathroom and elsewhere to remind people with dementia to wash their hands with soap for 20 seconds.
 - Demonstrate thorough hand-washing.
 - Alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can be a quick alternative to hand-washing if the person with dementia cannot get to a sink or wash his/her hands easily.
- Ask your pharmacist or doctor about filling prescriptions for a greater number of days to reduce trips to the pharmacy.
- Think ahead and make alternative plans for the person with dementia should adult day care, respite, etc. be modified or cancelled in response to COVID-19.

- Think ahead and make alternative plans for care management if the primary caregiver should become sick.

Tips for caregivers of individuals in assisted living

The CDC has provided guidance to facilities on infection control and prevention of COVID-19 in nursing homes. This guidance is for the health and safety of residents. Precautions may vary based on local situations. For more information, visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities).

- Check with the facility regarding their procedures for managing COVID-19 risk. Ensure they have your emergency contact information and the information of another family member or friend as a backup.
- Do not visit your family member if you have any signs or symptoms of illness.
- Depending on the situation in your local area, facilities may limit or not allow visitors. This is to protect the residents but it can be difficult if you are unable to see your family member.
- If visitation is not allowed, ask the facility how you can have contact with your family member. Options include telephone calls, video chats or even emails to check in.
- If your family member is unable to engage in calls or video chats, ask the facility how you can keep in touch with facility staff in order to get updates.

Staying healthy

Pay attention to flu or pneumonia-like symptoms in yourself and others and report them to a medical professional immediately.

Follow current guidance and instruction from the CDC regarding COVID-19. Tips to keep yourself and your loved ones healthy include:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick; work from home.
- If you or the person you are caring for have regular doctor's appointments to manage dementia or other health conditions, call your health care provider to inquire about a telehealth appointment. As a result of the COVID19 pandemic, Medicare has recently expanded telehealth benefits to allow seniors to access health care from the safety of their homes.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.

- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty.

For more information on how to protect yourself, visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html).

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