

Dementia: Information for caregivers during the early stages

You have a family member or friend who is in the early stages of dementia. You may have noticed changes in this person's behavior that are worrisome or make you anxious.

This disease might affect how this person functions, even on a daily basis. At times, the person might not remember familiar things, have displays of angry behavior, and have trouble with daily living skills, such as bathing, getting dressed and eating meals.

This person's care team at Kaiser Permanente can help you through some of the challenges. Learning about the illness and symptoms to watch for can also help you prepare for what's to come as this condition gets worse. This handout provides information and resources to help you as a caregiver.

Symptoms

The following symptoms may develop or get worse as the illness progresses:

- Memory of common or familiar things
- Recognizing family members and close friends
- Angry behavior
- Response time, such as operating a motor vehicle
- Thinking through decisions
- Following a conversation

Medicine

There is no cure for dementia, but there are medicines that might help with symptoms. If your loved one takes medicine for dementia, please watch for side effects and help to make sure the person goes to all follow-up appointments for care. Side effects of certain dementia medicines include nausea, diarrhea and trouble with sleep.

Take care of yourself

As a caregiver, you may feel overwhelmed, resentful, or scared about how to manage through this difficult time. All of these feelings are natural. Try to include your loved one in making decisions about their care as much as possible. This will take some of the burden off you, and help the other person feel some independence.

Remember to take care of yourself. It might feel like you can't take time away from your caregiving role, but it's important to take care of yourself and make sure your needs are met. Take time to relax and do the things you enjoy. Ask for help from family members, friends and neighbors you feel comfortable with to stay with your loved one. There are also services available that provide daytime care so you can have time for yourself.

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Resources

There is help available to remove some of the burden off you. The resources listed below can help you take care of your loved one and yourself:

Alzheimer's Association

www.alz.org

1-800-272-3900

Local chapters can provide core services to families and professionals, including information and referral, support groups, care consultation, education and safety services. Offers print material on various topics including caregiver stress, common behaviors and how to manage them, and a guide for respite care.

Kaiser Permanente Resource Line

1-800-992-2279

Call or email for information about resources and support available to help you as a caregiver. The Resource Line can provide printed material, as well as community services to help you with daily activities, such as housecleaning and transportation.

Kaiser Permanente Social Work Services

A social worker is available at all Kaiser Permanente medical offices to help patients and families cope with changes in health status and new medical needs. Talk with a member of the person's health care team about connecting with a social worker.