



Tips for supporting a person with dementia through COVID-19 pandemic

24 March 2020

Dementia Wellington are available for advice and support

Supporting a person with dementia during this challenging time may be difficult, these tips may be helpful for these next few days.

**Do your best to follow the COVID-19 hygiene guidelines.
Try to not worry or feel guilty if this is not entirely possible,
you are under very difficult circumstances.**

Difficulty understanding COVID-19 – person may be overwhelmed and anxious or not realise the seriousness of situation

- Keep explanations simple, perhaps refer to 'the flu' which is more familiar (rather than trying to explain COVID-19)
- Write explanation down and leave where person can see it and re read
- Limit person's (and your) exposure to the news, seek out positive posts on social media

Difficulty understanding and following the safe distancing and the hygiene practices recommended

- Wash your own hands at the same time to demonstrate
- If available to you use hand sanitiser as alternative to handwashing
- Choose objects in the home to demonstrate 2 metre distance e.g the length of a sofa.

Change of routine and increased family/community stress may cause distress/change in behaviour

- Try to keep some routine to your day (you may need to create new routines)
- Maintain your current supports (including DHB provided if this is possible)
- Accept any offers of assistance that could help you from friends/neighbours
- Be aware of your own feelings, talk to other people every day – friends, family or to talk to a Dementia Advisor, call **04 972 2595** Monday to Friday 8.30am – 5.30pm

Reduced stimulation due to closure of day programmes and community activities

- Create a plan for friends and family to phone/skype/facetime you at predictable times (especially any unsettled times of day)
- If possible, set up different areas around your home so that you can move from activity to activity: watch films 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, do a garden tidy up.
- Take a walk around the neighbourhood just remember to keep social distancing.
- Make a start on recording life story, see this website for tips on how to get started www.dementiauk.org/for-professionals/free-resources/life-story-work/

Supporting a person with dementia from a distance

- Create a plan for friends and family to phone/skype/facetime the person with dementia at predictable times (especially any unsettled times of day)
so person can anticipate social connection
- Think ahead of topics or stories likely to stimulate conversation.
- Avoid focusing on current situation.
- Send letters and cards, include photos.
- If person lives in residential care, respect guidelines and maintain communication with staff

Be alert to person with dementia becoming unwell

- **Delirium** can be triggered by being unwell and/or stress). Be aware of signs of delirium – a sudden escalation of dementia symptoms and/or more restlessness or more sleepiness. For more information about delirium see here edu.cdhb.health.nz/Patients-Visitors/patient-information-pamphlets/Documents/Preventing-Delirium-while-in-hospital-236937.pdf
- Contact your GP or Healthline 0800 358 5453 if you are concerned the person is becoming unwell.

Have a backup plan in place

Identify who will care for the person with dementia should you become unwell. If family/friend back up is not available, contact Dementia Wellington for advice.

Support from Dementia Wellington

- Call Dementia Wellington on 04 972 2595 for more dementia specific advice (Monday to Friday 8.30 am – 5.30 pm)
- Check Dementia Wellington's website and Facebook - resources are being regularly added

Website: www.dementiawellington.org.nz

Facebook: www.facebook.com/dementiawellington

The New Zealand Government's website for information regarding COVID-19 covid19.govt.nz