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Living alongside dementia

Information for relatives



Take a look at the strengths

When you experience changes in the abilities of a partner, family member or loved one, and even more so when they have been diagnosed with dementia, it is certainly difficult to stay composed. However, it is important to try. Some of your partner's or relative's (cognitive) abilities will decline. Now you can keep a wary eye on these changes. Or you can look at the 'strong abilities' that they certainly have! What are they good at? What do they enjoy? What are their interests? Focusing on weaknesses weakens. Focusing on the strengths strengthens! **Help your loved one to recognise their strengths.**



Organising everyday life actively

→ In the early stages of dementia

The everyday life needs to be adapted to the changed competences of your loved one. Encourage them not to become inactive, but to continue doing the things they have always been doing: e.g. shopping, cooking, doing the dishes, sending the post, tending the garden and more. When things no longer go as effortlessly and efficiently as before, the pace can be slowed down.

Your relative may now need more everyday rituals and routines than before in order to feel safe. Develop these together.

→ Concrete tips

- Avoid discussions about whether the person is already 'at home'.
- Reassure the person that they are safe.
- Try to distract from the conversation.
- Keep a protocol of when the person wants to go home so that you can avoid possible anxiety triggers in the future.



Take care of your own health

Living with dementia is a major challenge for the affected person, but also for those around them. Supporting and accompanying a person with dementia in everyday life can be a difficult task. Accepting help at an early stage enables the person with dementia and their relative to stay together for longer and makes daily life easier.

"Focus on your own strengths" should also be the motto for you as a family carer. Because sometimes strength will be required of you. What are you good at? What less? **What can you do yourself and in which areas does it make sense to involve other people and services in supporting your relative early on?**

To prevent physical and mental overload and to be able to continue supporting your relative well, it is important that you also look after your own health in everyday life. **Plan some time out, exercise regularly, eat a balanced diet and do the things you enjoy.**

*You can find further information under the following link
(available in German & in French):*

<https://demenz.lu/de/an-und-zugehoerige/>



→ Concrete tips

- Make sure that the person feels addressed.
- Approach the person and address them by name.
- Position yourself in front of them and at the same height and make eye contact.
- If necessary, gently touch their body (e.g. shoulder).
- Speak slowly and intelligibly (clear and short sentences).
- Complete your words by adding clear body language.
- Avoid questions (if necessary only ask 'yes/no' questions).
- Only give one message at a time.
- Be as patient and empathetic as possible.
- Do not take reproaches or accusations personally.
- Try to be positive, friendly and calm.
- Bear in mind that your own emotions are often reflected in the other person.

Changes in behaviour

People with dementia often find their everyday lives conflict-ridden or even threatening. They often find it difficult to understand processes and are therefore quickly overwhelmed.

It can be helpful to

- **learn to recognise the 'triggers'/warning signals** and defuse them. These can be noise, too much light, a loud/brash voice or overwhelm.
- **simplify everyday life** in order to minimise overwhelming situations. This means, for example, always leaving things in the same place and handing them in the right order.
- make sure that the person with dementia **feels accompanied** in everyday life, for example by maintaining eye contact and talking to them.
- **allow sufficient preparation time** for extraordinary activities such as a visit to the doctor to avoid stress.

Wishing to go home

It is not uncommon for a person with dementia to say that they want to go 'home', even if they are already in their own home. This wish often expresses an emotional need for security, familiarity and acceptance.

→ Throughout the course of the disease:

Maintain autonomy and responsibility

It is becoming increasingly difficult for people with dementia to learn new things. However, familiar activities can be practised and retained. There are many possibilities in the household: People with dementia can often still be good at chopping vegetables, sorting laundry, setting or wiping the table or being involved in other daily tasks. **They feel a sense of belonging and usefulness** when they can help out. For all everyday activities, you should focus on the strengths and preferences of the person concerned. Games, songs and leisure activities that are familiar from the past are often well received. The professional biography can also be taken into account here.

→ Provide guidance for orientation

A consistent, **clear daily routine**, bright light and illumination of important paths at night make it easier for those affected to find their way around. It is also advisable to **maintain the habits** of those affected as far as possible. If visitors are coming or you meet someone on the way, let them know in advance: 'Oh, here comes Mr So-and-so', '...your sister Nicole' etc.

Signs in your home can also be helpful. An easy-to-read clock and a calendar with the date marked on it make it easier to keep track of time. Further tips for making a home dementia-friendly can be found here (*available in German & in French*):

<https://demenz.lu/de/an-und-zugehoerige/wenn-die-einschraenkungen-schwerer-sind-oder-werden/alltag/#die-wohnung-anpassen>



Engagement and communication

As dementia progresses, conversations become increasingly difficult.

Communication also means encounter, relationship and exchange.

This does not necessarily require many words, but a little **creativity** and adjustment of the communication on the abilities of the other person. The prerequisite is to continue to accept people with dementia as equal communication partners.

Do you have questions about forgetfulness or dementia? We are here for you!

Our team offers free counselling with or
without an appointment.

Get in touch with us:

(+352) 26 47 00

info@demenz.lu

14a, rue des Bains, L-1212 Luxembourg



demenz.lu



Info-Zenter
Demenz



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DES GROSSHERZOGTUMS LUXEMBURG
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