



A moving guide for people with dementia

**Helping families
prepare a loved one for
residential aged care**

For a person with dementia, a move into a residential facility can be confusing and frightening. It is not uncommon for people with dementia to be disturbed by such a change. However, careful planning and sensitive handling of the transition can help your loved family member to adjust.

When you receive the call to say that a bed in a residential facility is available, you often have very little time to prepare. You are generally expected to move your family member in within the next few days. If you are on a waiting list, it is good to have the person's things ready so you can move quickly. Sometimes the facility will let you pass up a bed and wait for the next one; however, you run the risk that another bed may not be available for some time.



Planning for the move

If possible, talk to your loved one about their preferences for living arrangements while he or she can still make reasonable choices. It may be harder to make decisions about what your loved one would want as their dementia progresses. Involving him or her in the decision-making process will enhance the person's sense of control.

When talking about a possible move, explain simply and gently where and why they are moving. It is best to emphasise the positive aspects, such as the new friends they will make and the enjoyable activities that will be on offer.

It can also be helpful if your loved one has visited the facility before the move. A staged approach to 'sharing the care' can smooth the time of transition and cause less distress for all. Respite care (short stays) can help the person with dementia get to know the facility and its staff in a less challenging way. Your loved one is then more likely to be less uneasy if it becomes necessary for residential care to become permanent.

It may also be possible for your loved one to visit the facility on several occasions in the lead up to a permanent move. Talk to the facility manager about coming in to meet the staff and other residents over a cup of tea, for a meal or by joining in an activity you think they will enjoy, making it a positive experience.

Add familiar touches

Before the move, make your loved one's new room or space look and feel as familiar as possible. Family photos and familiar prints or paintings on the wall and favourite bed coverings can make the new room look a little like their own bedroom at home.

Involving your family member in choosing the items that are most important to them will help them come to terms with the pending change.

All personal items should be labelled with large, easy-to-read identification. Bringing heirlooms and priceless or irreplaceable items is not recommended as it is not possible to guarantee their safety. Consider bringing items that can be replaced easily if necessary – such as costume jewellery or copies of photos.

Familiar belongings can trigger feelings of connectedness and ownership, as well as boost your loved one's sense of security.



Consider preparing a scrapbook filled with past and present pictures of the resident, family members and friends. Label photographs to help staff members or others identify the people in your loved one's life and encourage conversations about the past. This can provide security for the resident and helps staff to get to know the person better.

Help us get to know your loved one

If you have been caring for your family member, you will know a lot of information that residential care staff will need to know to provide the best possible care and help your loved one to settle in. Some of the things that they will want to know include:

- Preferred activities and interests – do they like to walk, dance, listen to music, draw, paint etc.?
- Summary of their personal history – it's helpful for staff to know the work the person did, where they grew up, and who was important in their life; for example, if the resident often refers to Max, it's good for staff to know that he was a beloved uncle.
- Information on the person's behavior – are they active or passive, are there things or circumstances that agitate them, such as do they react badly when someone speaks to them in a loud voice?

- Food likes and dislikes – what do they like for breakfast, are there certain foods they won't eat, or are allergic to?
- Tips on personal hygiene – do they need assistance with brushing their teeth, do they have trouble with bathing?
- Abilities – have they lost their ability to communicate verbally, do they understand cues and directions, do they need assistance with feeding?
- List of family members and friends who will visit.

The day of the move

On the day of the move, follow your loved one's normal routine as much as possible. Arriving in the morning is preferred by facilities, but you should talk to the staff about timing the move to coincide with your loved one's best time of day – whether it's in the morning or afternoon.

During the move, do your best to stay positive. Your attitude can help your loved one to feel safe and secure in their new environment. If possible, have two people help with the move – one who can attend to the administrative details and the other who can stay with the person with dementia.

Once your loved one is settled, trust the staff to help with the next big step – your departure. Rather than making a big deal about your leaving, the staff might engage your loved one in a meaningful activity while you walk away.

Adjusting takes time

Keep in mind that it may take your loved one a couple of months to acclimatise to his or her new living arrangement. Some level of discomfort always accompanies change, particularly when a person is living with dementia. It is estimated that two-thirds of new residents begin to adjust in 2 to 4 weeks and one-third take 2 to 6 months. For most, a full adjustment is gradual.

The reactions of people with dementia to a move can range from being relieved and content to being agitated, angry and sad. Some may express their emotions by unwarranted accusations against the caregiver and/or the staff and may plead for help or to go home.

Normally, accusations against the facility are a reflection of the resident's dislocation and confusion. However it is very important to check with staff and management to make sure that interactions with the resident are being handled in a professional and caring way.

A common phrase heard from people with dementia in residential facilities is 'I want to go home'. This can be especially upsetting for family and carers. Wanting to go home may be caused by feelings of insecurity, depression or fear. It may be that 'home' is a term used to describe memories of a time or place that was comfortable and secure. When you are visiting, it is very hard to hear this. Disagreeing with him or her is likely to only inflame emotions and reasoning with a person with dementia will also be unsuccessful. It's best to reassure them that they will be safe and remind them of your love for them. Refocus their attention to another subject such as reminiscing about happy childhood or family memories, or get them involved in an activity such as walking or eating. Surprisingly, family caregivers sometimes take longer to adjust than residents. Residents eventually forget they're not home; you never do.



Continuing to care

Many people believe that full time residential care will remove them from the caring role. However you don't stop caring just because you no longer do the physical tasks of caring. Allowing others to take responsibility for the practical caring tasks does not lessen the importance of your role as a carer. In fact, you are the 'expert' when it comes to caring for the person with dementia.

Our role with professional care workers is to inform, advise, recommend, make decisions and encourage the best possible quality of care for your loved one. You can also continue to contribute to their physical care if you wish. When a person with dementia moves into residential care the role of families and carers doesn't usually end. Many people choose to stay involved with practical caring tasks such as assisting at mealtimes. Others become involved in the social activities at the facility. The level of involvement varies with each individual.

There is no rule to say how much involvement you should have.

It is your choice.

Remember you must also respond to your own needs as well as feel comfortable about your level of involvement in the care of the person with dementia.

Visiting your family member

Work with the staff to determine how frequently you should visit during the first few weeks. Some residents need time alone to accept their new living arrangements. Others will be anxious to see you regularly. It is often best to try to visit very soon after placement. If it seems to agitate your loved one, wait a few days and then try again. If your visits are upsetting the person but you are anxious to see how they are adjusting, you might want to check if there's a vantage point from which you can observe them, without being seen. You may also consider phoning him or her to say 'hello' as well as speak to staff to ask how things are going. Once your loved one has settled in, you can visit as often as you like.

Visiting is often the main way that families and carers stay connected with people they have cared for, even though they may no longer provide the day-to-day caregiving. The person with dementia may enjoy seeing other members of the family or old friends. Encourage grandchildren to visit. If the children are young, prepare a visiting bag that contains treats or activities to keep them entertained. If the facility allows it, bring in a pet.

Visiting can sometimes be difficult, especially as the abilities of the person with dementia declines. Try to find some ways to make visiting as pleasurable as possible.

- Bring newspapers and magazines to look at together.
- Read mail together.
- Play games that have been enjoyed in the past.
- Arrange to have a meal together.
- Listen to a tape of their favourite music, or a story.
- Watch a well-loved video.
- Look at photo albums together.
- Help decorate and tidy the room.
- Help with personal grooming – washing or brushing hair, painting nails.
- Assist with writing to friends and relatives.

The person with dementia might also enjoy an outing. Try a short drive in the car, perhaps stopping for afternoon tea, visit another person in the facility or take a stroll or wheel around the facility garden.



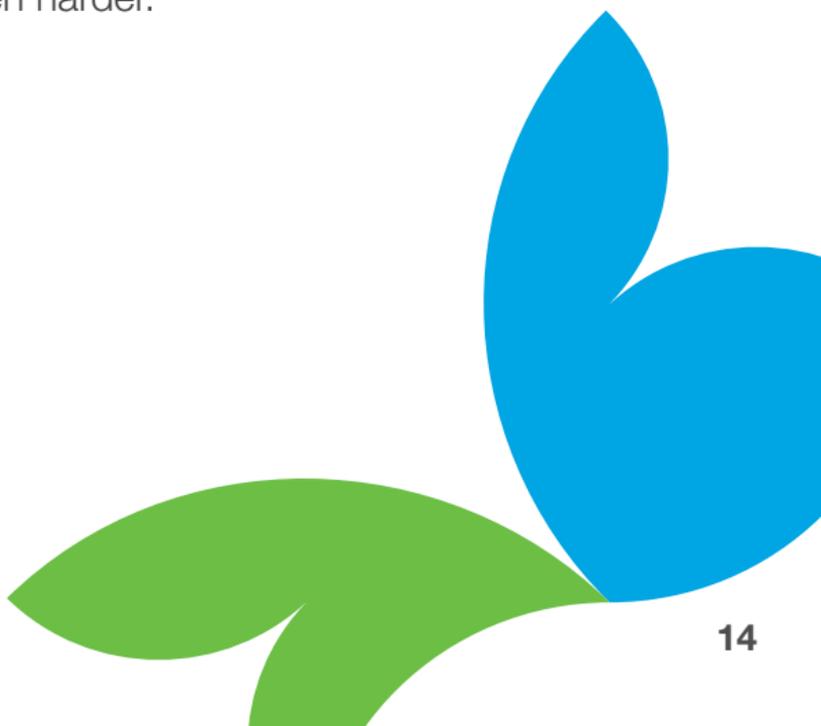
Visiting a relative can become more challenging for family in the later stages of dementia. Try some of the following suggestions that use as many of the senses as possible – sight, taste, smell, hearing and touch – to get a positive response from your loved one.

- A gentle kiss or hand holding may be reassuring.
- Massaging legs, hands and feet with scented creams or oils may be enjoyable for some people. The scent of perfumes and flowers may also be enjoyed.
- A smile, a comforting gaze or a look of affection may often provide reassurance.
- Favourite music may provide comfort and familiarity.
- Visits from friends and relatives, even though they may not be recognised or remembered, can still provide stimulation and comfort.
- Listening to a favourite book or poem being read may be enjoyable.
- A stroll around the grounds, even if in a wheelchair, may be enjoyable for both the resident and visitor.

There is no right number of times to visit or amount of time to stay. The important thing is to make each visit as rewarding as possible.

Leaving after a visit can be a very difficult time for both the person with dementia and their visitors. Here are a few ideas that can make this a little easier:

- Take something to do. Once you have finished this, it is time to go.
- Ask the staff to divert the resident or leave when a meal is about to be served so that there will be something else to do.
- Let the person know at the beginning of the visit how long you can stay and why you have to leave. For instance 'I can stay for an hour but then I have to go shopping'.
- Keep farewells brief and leave straight away. Linger, apologising or staying a little longer can make future farewells even harder.



Caring for yourself

Preparing for the period after your loved one has settled into residential care is just as important as preparing for the move. The time of separation can be emotional with a variety of mixed feelings. These might include feelings of relief, guilt or grief. Certainly your daily activities will suddenly change.

It is important to take care of yourself when the move takes place. Residential staff will be looking after the person with dementia – consider who is going to help you at this time. Call on family and friends for support during and immediately after the move.

If you would like to discuss your feelings you can contact:

- **The National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500, or**
- **Carers WA Counselling Service on 1800 007 332**

Additional information about dementia can be found on the Alzheimer's Australia website www.fightdementia.org.au



For more information on helping to move a loved one with dementia into an aged care facility, call our Customer Centre on 1300 660 640.

About Baptistcare

For more than 40 years, we have helped to transform and enrich the lives of the people we support and care for.

Today we operate 13 residential aged care facilities in metropolitan Perth and regional WA.

At a Baptistcare facility you will enjoy a comfortable and home-like setting and receive a personal approach to ensure all your needs are met now and into the future.

We understand the move into residential aged care is a major step for you and your family. At Baptistcare, you will be warmly welcomed and given every assistance to help you settle into your new home.

A complete service

As well as aged care, Baptistcare provides other support in the community, including mental health services and helping people with disabilities. By choosing to live at Yallambee, you will have access to our wider network of professionals if you ever need further support.

*At the heart of everything we do
is one simple principle*

...we care about people.



**For more information call our
Customer Centre on
1300 660 640 or visit
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