

# Managing Changes: Memory and Thinking

Also available in Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese

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This is a resource for the Chinese community. It was developed together with caregivers of people living with dementia within the Chinese community in Canada. A caregiver could be a family member, friend, or another person who is supporting a person living with dementia.

## This resource provides information about:

- ✓ Common changes with memory and thinking, and related strategies for people living with dementia and caregivers
- ✓ Supports and services such as medication and cognitive therapies



## Changes with memory and thinking

Difficulties with memory and thinking are common symptoms for many types of dementia and may include difficulty with remembering, concentrating, problem-solving, planning, and decision-making. These changes can make everyday activities, such as keeping track of appointments, navigating in the community, making meals, getting dressed, managing finances, or home safety, more difficult. There are strategies, therapies, and medications that may help.

What you might notice:	Strategies for people living with dementia:	Strategies for caregivers:
<p><b>Forgetting to do things at the right time</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use a reminder system, such as an alarm clock or phone alarm.</li> <li>● Use virtual assistants, such as Google Assistant or Amazon’s Alexa, to set reminders. E.g., “Alexa, set a reminder for me to take my medication at 4 p.m. everyday”.</li> <li>● Ask someone to remind you of tasks, either in person or by phone.</li> <li>● Speak with your pharmacist about a blister pack for medications, or consider an automatic pill dispenser.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Help with setting-up reminder systems.</li> <li>● Develop a consistent daily routine together.</li> <li>● Set up tasks. For example, leave a basket with laundry out, or fill the sink with water to wash the dishes. Give reminders as needed.</li> <li>● <b>Avoid</b> getting frustrated when things are forgotten.</li> </ul>

What you might notice:	Strategies for people living with dementia:	Strategies for caregivers:
<p><b>Getting confused or distracted during tasks</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many people find they think best in the morning. Try to schedule activities when you are rested.</li> <li>• Do one thing at a time instead of multitasking.</li> <li>• Use a checklist for the task you are working on, and mark off steps as you complete them.</li> <li>• Repeat the task in your mind or out loud as you complete it. E.g., “get the prescription from the kitchen.”</li> <li>• Take breaks or a rest between tasks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on a single task or instruction at a time.</li> <li>• Be patient and provide encouragement.</li> <li>• Ask the person if they need help before stepping in.</li> <li>• <b>Avoid</b> taking over tasks, as this can be frustrating and may cause the person to lose skills. Do tasks together, instead of doing them for the person.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Keeping track of appointments</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a day planner, calendar or your phone to keep track of appointments.</li> <li>• Use memory aids that are easy to see, such as a large calendar on the fridge, a whiteboard, and a large display clock.</li> <li>• Ask to receive text or phone appointment reminders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prompt the person living with dementia to look at their memory aids often.</li> <li>• Provide reminders and help the person prepare for the appointment.</li> </ul>

**What you might notice:**

**Strategies for people living with dementia:**

**Strategies for caregivers:**

**Losing or forgetting items**

- Establish places for important items such as a basket labeled “wallet”.
- Label cupboards, drawers and bins in the house.
- Use small electronic tags to attach to items that are easily lost.
- Use brightly coloured glasses straps, key lanyards and phone cases.
- Have a list of things to take on outings near the front door.
- Make copies of important documents and bank cards.
- Use a password manager, which is a secure piece of software to store all online passwords.

- Work together to reduce clutter or unneeded items in the home.
- Prompt the person to place items in established places.
- Have spares of important items such as keys, glasses and hearing aids.

**What you might notice:**

**Strategies for people living with dementia:**

**Strategies for caregivers:**

**Difficulty navigating in the community**

- Practice getting to and from places you visit often.
- Use a map navigation app when walking.
- Carry your personal details (address and important phone numbers) in your wallet or purse. Consider wearing a medical identification bracelet.
- Set up a ‘rideshare’ app on your phone. If you get lost, the app can be used to find your location, call a driver, and instruct the driver to take you home.
- Consider printing a Dementia Card to discreetly alert people that you may need their support.

- Discuss purchasing a medical identification bracelet.
- Research whether a vulnerable persons registry, such as those associated with the local police, is available in your area.

**What you might notice:**

**Strategies for people living with dementia:**

**Strategies for caregivers:**

**Difficulty making meals**

- Consider a motion-activated tap and/or a device that automatically shuts off your stove if you forget to turn them off.
- Write out recipes for your favourite meals to refer back to.
- Keep fewer ingredients in the house, use labels on containers and organize ingredients so they are easier to find.
- Before you start cooking, gather all the ingredients and equipment you will need. Check off ingredients on the recipe as you add them, or steps in the recipe as you complete them.
- Buy some dishes pre-made or partially made.

- Have ongoing conversations about whether it is safe for the person to cook alone.
- Find ways to cook meals together.
- If the person lives alone, consider bringing over meals or purchasing ready-to-eat foods.
- Consider grocery or meal-delivery services if needed.

What you might notice:	Strategies for people living with dementia:	Strategies for caregivers:
<p><b>Difficulty getting dressed</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Make it easier to decide what to wear each day. Buy multiples of clothes you like and wear similar clothes each day.</li> <li>● Get rid of clothes you rarely wear. Organize your clothes so that it's easier to find things.</li> <li>● Put clothes that are not appropriate for the season away.</li> <li>● Choose clothes that are easy to put on. Get rid of clothes with complicated fastenings or lots of buttons.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ask the person if they would like help choosing outfits, or laying them out the night before.</li> <li>● Encourage the person to dress for the weather.</li> <li>● <b>Avoid</b> rushing or taking over.</li> </ul>

**What you might notice:**

**Strategies for people living with dementia:**

**Strategies for caregivers:**

**Difficulty managing finances**

- Set up automated bill payments.
- Ask someone you trust or your accountant to go through your bank statements with you each month.
- If you have trouble with bills and coins, consider a contactless debit or credit card with a spending limit.
- Appoint someone you trust with financial power of attorney to handle financial matters when you are no longer able to yourself.

- Encourage conversations about power of attorney and finances early in the progression of dementia when possible.



**What you might notice:**

**Strategies for people living with dementia:**

**Strategies for caregivers:**

**Difficulty managing home safety or emergencies**

- Have phone numbers for emergency services, neighbours, friends, and family programmed into your phone. Leave a written copy of this list by the phone.
- Consider a personal alarm system, such as a pendant worn around your neck. In an emergency, such as a fall, you can press the button on the pendant to alert the company and caregivers that you need help.
- Put a note on the inside of the front door, reminding yourself to lock the doors when you leave.

- Discuss whether security devices such as a doorbell/outdoor security cameras, or personal alarm systems would help you and the person to feel more safe.
- If the person lives alone, arrange for someone to visit or call to check-in daily. Visit [forwardwithdementia.ca](http://forwardwithdementia.ca) with dementia to **Learn About Programs and Services.**

## Supports and services

Lifestyle factors such as sleeping and eating well, and being mentally and socially active, can affect your memory and thinking. Visit [forwardwithdementia.ca](http://forwardwithdementia.ca) for non-medical strategies related to **Having Hope and Living Well**.

There are currently four approved medications approved for dementia in Canada - donepezil (Aricept), galantamine (Reminyl), rivastigmine (Exelon), and memantine (Ebixa). Not all types of dementia have medication therapies available. **Speak with your family doctor about whether medications might work for you.**

Some therapies have been developed to help with memory and thinking. For example, **Cognitive Stimulation Therapy** refers to programs that encourage people living with dementia to use different parts of their brain. Programs may include conversations and mental or physical games. **Cognitive rehabilitation** focuses on treatment to find new ways to do tasks that have become challenging. Unfortunately, these services are not widely available. **Ask your family doctor whether these therapies are available near you.**

**Brain training** involves doing mental exercises. It is not clear whether brain training improves thinking, but some people living with dementia find it helpful. **You can find brain training websites, or do activities that require mental effort such as puzzles, playing an instrument, learning a new skill, playing cards, or socializing.**



## Notes

Use this space to write down any notes, reflections, or questions you have about this resource.