

# New Town Dementia Connection



Source: Forbes.com

## **Special Issue: CAREGIVING IN THE TIME OF COVID-19**

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## CARING FOR A LOVED ONE WITH DEMENTIA DURING COVID-19

It's everywhere on television, radio, newspapers, social media.... Each day brings more and more news and information about coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). This virus attacks the lungs, making it difficult to breathe. It is a serious health risk, with older folks and people with compromised immunity at the highest risk. The spread of COVID-19 has been very fast and very wide, mainly because people who have the virus do not start to show symptoms for several days. They feel perfectly fine and go about their daily lives, not knowing they are spreading the infection to others.

But you can do something to protect yourself and your loved ones. Simple measures to decrease the spread of the virus are very well-known by now: wash hands frequently, practice “social distancing” by staying at least 6-feet away from others while outside your home, and stay home as much as possible.

As we all know, those with dementia tend to function best in a familiar environment with a sense of daily routine. During this time of rapid change, maintaining a routine may be difficult at home. If the person you are caring for has been attending a day program or other structured community based programs most likely these are temporarily closed. We know that the loss of these programs and social networks will be a major concern to caregivers and we hope we can offer some guidance and resources during this challenging time.



Know the symptoms of COVID-19. Call your doctor if you or your loved one develops any of these.

There are things that dementia caregivers can do to stay healthy, safe, and sane during the COVID-19 outbreak, whether you are caring for a loved one at home or if your loved one is in an assisted living or long term care facility.

In this issue of **Dementia Connection**, we provide links to some helpful online resources as well as tips for caregiving, protecting yourself, and staying active while staying at home.

## RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT COVID-19

**There is a lot of information out there.** Some of it is reliable, accurate, and helpful. Others not so much. In situations such as this where your health and the health of your loved ones is at stake, you need to be sure that you are educating yourself through the most accurate and trusted sources. The websites below are good places to start:

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has up to date information about the pandemic, what to do if you have symptoms, and what resources are available.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

The State of Florida provides state and local information and toolkits.

<http://www.floridahealth.gov/>

The Alzheimer's Association is offering online caregiver support and a free 24/7 call-in helpline (800-272-3900)

<https://www.alz.org/>

The Alzheimer's Association Brain Bus - a mobile dementia education program - is now available from any computer, tablet, or smartphone. Sign up for sessions here:

<https://tinyurl.com/alz-brain-bus>

The Lewy Body Dementia Association (LBDA), Parkinson's Foundation, and Association of Frontotemporal Dementia (AFTD) have dementia-specific information on their websites for caregivers of loved ones with these non-Alzheimer's Dementia types.

<https://www.lbda.org/Coronavirus>

<https://www.parkinson.org/blog/tips/Coronavirus>

<https://www.theaftd.org/living-with-ftd/covid-19-and-ftd/>

Mayo Clinic shares the latest news about COVID-19 here:

<https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/category/covid-19/>

The American Academy of Neurology's online magazine for people who are living with neurological diseases, including dementia, also contains helpful information regarding COVID-19 from trusted sources within the field of Neurology.

<https://www.brainandlife.org/>



## TIPS FOR PROVIDING CARE AT HOME

### **Be patient.**

Start slow and small. Engage your loved one in a 15 minute activity of light things to do around the house. Perhaps they can help sort/fold laundry, hang clothes in the closet, straighten up a desk, or open the mail. Just like all of us, a person with dementia wants to feel helpful and valued. Every little bit helps.

### **Establish a daily routine.**

A daily routine need not be fancy or involve lots of excitement. Just getting through the day with a positive attitude is sometimes enough. Try to wake at the same time, start the day in the same way (grooming, medications, breakfast), perhaps then a short walk within the house, in the yard, or around the property is fine. Inside the home there are a number of activities you can engage in (see a more extensive list of activities on page 6).

- If you want to keep active, look into office-style exercises like chair stretches, swiveling your torso from side to side (great for your core!), or "marching" your feet up and down while seated.
- Discussing an interesting article from the paper or a topic you've heard on the news can be enjoyable.
- Take a walk down memory lane by exploring drawers and cabinets where cherished items from the past have been stored.
- Listen to music, have a sing-along, or create an arts-and-crafts project.
- Play a game or work on a puzzle together.

Afternoon can begin by preparing lunch together (and remember, placing silverware and plates on the table is helping!). After lunch, maybe a little quiet time for both of you.

Late afternoon and early evening can bring confusion and frustration in some people with dementia. Try to plan enjoyable events: game shows, cards, calls to (or Facetime) family and friends. After dinner, try to keep the evening low key and establish a bed time routine.

Changes in mood or behavior are common with dementia and to be expected. With all of the changes in the world the person with dementia may also be a bit out of sorts. If changes are drastic and persistent, you may want to contact your health care provider.

As always, try to stay calm and above all else, be sure to take care of yourself!





## TIPS WHEN A LOVED ONE RESIDES IN A FACILITY

Many care facilities (assisted living, memory care, long term care and related residential care facilities) are not allowing visitors – even family members – in an effort to curtail the spread of COVID-19. This is causing caregivers much anxiety. Unless your loved one is still able to communicate via phone or social media without frustration, this is a very hard situation for you as a caregiver.

### **Keep the lines of communication open.**

To the degree you are able, try to remain in ongoing contact with a dedicated staff member in a manner that is approved by the facility. Use this time to find out details about how your loved one is doing and what has been happening in the facility. When you call to speak directly to your loved one, try to make the call upbeat and brief. If your loved one complains about something, try to reassure them and help them feel better (if you are concerned about the complaint, bring it up the next time you call the staff member). To make your loved one feel better, try to distract them by giving an update on a favorite person or reminisce about something you and your loved one had fun doing in the past. Try not to be upset if your loved one becomes confused and calls you by another name or becomes angry about something. Sometimes it can be rewarding just to hear the sound of their voice.

## PROTECT YOURSELF FROM COVID-19

There are things you can do to protect yourself, and help limit the spread of COVID-19:

- Pause for a moment and collect your thoughts. Pandemics can be overwhelming, and remaining as calm as possible can help.
- Clean your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds with soap and water (the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice). If you don't have access to soap and water, use hand sanitizer.
- When you come home and before bed, disinfect items that are frequently touched, like cellphones and their cases, door handles, and keyboards.
- If you are sick, stay home and try to limit your contact with others.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid all contact with family members who have low immunity. Social distancing of at least 6-feet is essential to minimize the spread of COVID-19.
- Get adequate sleep and eat sensibly.

## STAYING ACTIVE IN THE TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

Social (physical) distancing is important, but you can keep in contact with friends and family through other means. Relationships are important for well-being, so call, text or use other methods (Facetime, Skype, Zoom) to virtually connect with others.

**Sample Activities.** To stay active at home, try some of these ideas:

- Start a gratitude journal
- Watch a game show on television or online and play along
- Gardening
- Read the Bible, pray or follow a religious tradition
- Call a close friend or relative
- Work on a puzzle, crossword puzzle, or word games
- Play a board game
- Look through old family photos and recall happy times and family events
- Dance or sing along with your favorite music
- Watch a movie
- Consider cooking or baking together
- FaceTime or Skype with grandchildren or other relatives
- Try meditation
- Engage in safe exercises

**Sample daily schedule.** Routines are helpful when caring for someone with dementia. Here's an example:

7:00 Wake up, morning grooming  
7:30 Medications and breakfast  
8:00 Clean kitchen and take a look at the news or read the paper  
9:00 Short walk or in house activity such as chair stretches or chair yoga  
10:00 Play a game or read  
11:00 Prepare lunch  
Noon Lunchtime!  
1:00 Quiet time or nap  
2:00 Call a friend or do a puzzle  
3:00 Dance or sing  
4:00 Exercise  
5:00 Prepare dinner together  
6:00 Eat Dinner  
7:00 Watch TV programs or a movie  
Prepare for bed  
Good night!



## WE CARE ABOUT YOUR SAFETY

The health and the safety of our community is important to us. On the advice of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Mayo Clinic Infection Prevention & Control, we must CANCEL our community activities through April due to the impact of COVID-19 in Jacksonville. We will actively monitor the status of the pandemic and make decisions regarding our May calendar of events as the end of April draws near.

We will resume our community education, skill-building, and support activities as soon as we can do so safely. Please check our website (<https://dementiaoutreach.mayo.edu/calendar>) for additional updates, additions, or cancellations to our event calendar.

In addition, we again strongly encourage everyone to follow CDC guidelines for disease prevention (we know we already told you this, but it bears repeating!).

- If you have a cough, cold, or fever, please stay home.
- Cover coughs/sneezes with a disposable tissue or the inside of your elbow.
- Wash hands often for at least 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice).
- Limit close contact with others. Avoid hugging/shaking hands and keep a distance of 6 feet apart.
- Inform your doctor if you have a fever and have trouble breathing.
- If you encounter someone who has traveled internationally or been in contact with someone with known coronavirus, self-monitor for symptoms and contact your health provider as needed.



Artist: Katherine Roundtree

### A Testimony to Our Community

As a member of our community, I believe we can all support each other through these challenging times. I also believe that we are strengthened by our own personal faith, and am reminded of Isaiah 41:10, *Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed...I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you.*

- Shirley Brown, Newsletter Editor



Source: Laeacco Photography

# NEWS & NOTES

Mayo Clinic Behavioral Neurology Fellow, Dr. Philip Tipton, recently provided an evening of education at EWC Schell Sweet Community Center to help attendees learn more about dementia and understand differences between Alzheimer's and other diseases that cause dementia. The Education & Skill Building committees of the New Town Dementia Friendly Community program bring information and awareness about Alzheimer's disease and AD-related dementia to community members. If there is a topic you would like to hear about, please feel free to let us know by contacting us at the number/email address below.



**Note:** Source materials for this special issue were obtained from the State of Florida Department of Elder Affairs, Northeast Florida Caregiver Coalition, and Outreach, Recruitment, & Engagement cores of the National Institute on Aging Alzheimer's Disease Research Center program.

Thank you to Ms. Francine Parfitt for compiling this information and composing the special issue.

Visit our website: <https://dementiaoutreach.mayo.edu>



If you would like to learn how you can help in the fight against Alzheimer's, please contact the Mayo Clinic Alzheimer's Disease Center

Phone: 904-953-6523

Email: [FLAMayoADRC@mayo.edu](mailto:FLAMayoADRC@mayo.edu)