

Adjusting after a move

This information is for you if you are caring for someone living with dementia after a move to a long-term care home. From talking to families, we know that moving the person you care for to a long-term care home and adjusting to the many changes may be one of the most difficult stages you experience. This information covers things to think about and hands-on tips to help you and the person living with dementia adjust after a move.



A note about the terms we use:

- “Caregiver” refers to anyone involved in caring for or providing support to someone with dementia.
- “Dementia” refers to all kinds of dementia—including the most common kind, Alzheimer’s disease.
- “Long-term care home” and “home” refer to a “nursing home”. The terms for nursing home vary across Canada; we use “long-term care home” or “home” for easier reading.

It will take time for both you and the person with dementia to adjust to the new living situation. Although you should expect a period of adjustment, the person will eventually settle. To help things go smoothly during the first few weeks after the move, follow these tips:

- Keep reassuring the person by telling them how much you care.
- Familiarize yourself with the home and make an effort to get to know the staff, management, residents and other caregivers. This will help you and the person living with dementia relax.
- Consider joining the person for a few meals in the dining room with other residents. This can help the person get used to the new surroundings and meet other residents.
- Try to attend care plan meetings, family council meetings and possibly join in social activities.
- Help with tasks such as mealtimes and personal grooming. Before taking on any particular role, discuss it with the care team.

Continuing support

Give yourself some time and remember that you have not lost your role as a caregiver; you now share the responsibility of care with others. To provide ongoing support for the person living with dementia, follow these tips:

- Share your knowledge about the person with the staff such as life long habits, likes, dislikes and daily routines. You may find the Alzheimer Society's *All about me* booklet useful for recording this information and sharing it with staff. The booklet is available at alzheimer.ca/allaboutme.
- Discuss options for meeting the person's needs and preferences. Ask questions if you need complicated words or procedures explained.
- Tell staff your feelings and concerns such as what help you need or questions you may have. Maintain realistic expectations of the staff and the home.
- Keep up to date with the doctor and staff about the person's condition, care and treatment. Ask for a copy of the care plan.
- Ask to have regular care planning meetings with staff. Remember, you are partners in the person's care team.
- Treat all staff as individuals and build relationships with them.

Meaningful visits

Even people who are well into the later stages of dementia still have feelings; everyone needs to feel supported. Visiting is an important way for you to support the person and stay connected now that you are no longer providing day-to-day care. Visiting may be emotionally difficult for some people. It is important to do what feels right for you.

Visits can be:

- A way to continue life-long routines: Schedule visits around activities like sharing a meal together.
- A social time: Consider timing your visit to participate in a group activity such as a musical event.
- A chance for some more personal time: Enjoy quiet times alone together reading or reminiscing.
- A way to build connections: Consider having other family members visit, such as children, to help the person feel more connected.
- An outing to an art gallery or to a local garden. Remember to discuss your plans with the staff before the outing.

There may be many people visiting at different times. To help you and the person living with dementia remember who visited and the details of the visit, create a visitor guest book. Check with the staff first to see if it is possible to leave a visitor guest book in the person's room.

If visiting is not an easy option due to distance, try recording your voice or sending pictures of you and other family members so the person continues to feel connected.

For more tips about how to make the most of your visits, please visit alzheimer.ca/meaningfulvisits.

Your own adjustment

During this transition, it will take time to adjust to your new schedule. Providing care for someone living with dementia takes a tremendous toll on your physical and emotional health as the caregiver. However, it is common to be so involved in caregiving that you may overlook caring for yourself.

To actively care for yourself, try these self-care tips:

- Maintain and rebuild the connections that are important to you. For example, think about your interests and hobbies and consider contacting some friends or joining clubs, etc.
- Seek out support because it is one of the most important ways to come to terms with the feelings of loss and grief that are often part of caring for someone. It is important to reach out to individuals in your life who are your “psychological family,” meaning the people you naturally turn to in times of crisis and celebration. Identify the people in your life who are there for you in good times and bad. These are people who may be in the strongest position to understand you, acknowledge your remarkable efforts and successes, and give vital support.

- Keep in mind that whatever you are feeling, it’s normal; you may feel lonely or empty without the person or you may not have these feelings. Also, remember that not all caring relationships are loving and close. If your relationship with the person living with dementia is difficult, it is natural to be sad about not having a more positive relationship with them.
- Try to be realistic about the nature of dementia. Sometimes caregivers expect that the person will improve under the care of professionals. However, the dementia will continue to progress regardless of where the person lives. Continue to learn about dementia and how to support the person during each stage.

Give yourself some time and remember you have not lost your role as a caregiver; you are now sharing the responsibility with others. You and the person living with dementia will be facing different experiences and will need time to adjust to the changes after the move. To help address your concerns about settling in, consider the following tips.

“I am still in touch with my mother’s two PSW’s that cared for her for 7 years before her death 6 years ago. They are like family to me.” – Caregiver



Tips for settling in

Common concerns about settling in	Tips to help address your concerns
I'm not sure how long it will take the person to adjust to their new environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try to be patient as the person settles in. For some, it may take weeks or months and for others, less. On the other hand, the person may adjust quite well to their new surroundings.• Communicate closely with the staff during this adjustment period.• You may have mixed emotions. These feelings are completely natural.• Remember, you have not lost your role as a caregiver, you are now sharing the responsibility with others.
I don't know how to react if the person asks difficult questions or says things like "I want to go home."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find out what might be causing difficult questions or statements.• Is the person feeling unsafe? Sometimes the person simply needs reassurance.
I'm not sure how often I should visit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit as often as you want and stay for as long as you feel comfortable.• For some people, caregiving has been so demanding that they need a break during the first few weeks after moving. Others want to visit as often as possible during the first few weeks.• The important thing is to make each visit—regardless of length or frequency—as full and rewarding as possible for both of you.
I'm not sure what to do if the staff provides care differently than what the person is used to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share your knowledge about care routines that worked for you and the person you cared for.• Acknowledge that there will be differences between the caregiving routine at the home and how you cared for the person.• Engage in an open conversation about why they provide care in a certain way. It may be a better way of doing it!
Now that I'm not responsible for day-to-day care, I'm not sure what my role is.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus your time and energy on providing the person with a sense of belonging and love that no one else can give.• If you wish to continue to contribute to the physical care of the person, negotiate your role with the staff.• Allowing others to take responsibility for the day-to-day caring tasks does not make you a less important caregiver.

Ideas for spending time together:

- Look at photos.
- Go for a walk.
- Listen to music.
- Hold hands.
- Brush the person's hair or massage their hands with a perfumed cream.
- Rummage through interesting items that have meaning for the person (e.g. a variety of fabrics for a sewer or baseball memorabilia for a sports fan).
- Enjoy painting or creating something.
- Share a snack.
- Read aloud from the newspaper or from a favourite book.
- Visit a garden.
- Do tasks like folding towels.
- Walk around the home and meet other residents.
- Watch videos.
- Read aloud letters or emails from friends or listen to a message or voicemail.
- Pre-arrange to call a friend or family member.
- Sit where you can see activities like at a window overlooking a busy street or a garden with a bird feeder.

"Keeping my mother happy was all that mattered. If something made her happy, like a strawberry ice cream treat or listening to music, we always tried to do that." – Caregiver

Need more information?

Contact your local Alzheimer Society for information and support. Visit our website at alzheimer.ca/find.

This resource is informed by research and the experiences of people living with dementia and their caregivers. We thank Catherine Hofstetter, a caregiver, for her review of this resource. To provide feedback on this factsheet, please email publications@alzheimer.ca.

Alzheimer Society

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