



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Disabilities and Dementia

How Can You Know if Someone With Special Needs Has Dementia?

People with special needs live longer now than in the past. This means they can get dementia just like anyone else. People who have Down syndrome have a very high chance of getting one common type of dementia - Alzheimer's disease. Almost everyone with Down syndrome will get it. And, they often get it at a young age - often in their 40s or 50s. People with seizures that begin in early adulthood also have a higher risk of Alzheimer's disease.

The symptoms of dementia can be different in someone with special needs. It can cause them to forget skills they have learned. And like everyone else who gets dementia, they may be unable to take care of themselves.

If you are taking care of someone with special needs, here are some signs of dementia that you might see.

Signs of Dementia in a Person with Special Needs

Less interest in being sociable, talking, or telling you what they think.

Less interest in usual activities.

Less ability to pay attention.

Being sad, fearful, or anxious.

Being irritable, aggressive, or not cooperating.

Sleep problems.

Being noisy.

Trouble walking or losing coordination.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

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Someone with special needs may not understand what ‘dementia’ is. They may not understand what is happening to them. They may get upset or frustrated. You can help them in several ways. Tell them to see a doctor to find out what kind of dementia they have. Be supportive and patient. Use words they know. Help them to continue doing things they like to do. Keep a normal schedule.

Dementia can get worse quickly in people with special needs, so be prepared to add support when needed to keep them safe.

Tips to Support Someone with Special Needs and Dementia

Talking might become hard for them. Pay attention to their body language to help figure out what they want or need.

Listen carefully to everything they try to tell you.

Be positive and reassuring.

Let them be in control when possible.

Help them feel secure and comfortable by sticking to regular routines and schedules.

Try to keep things calm and familiar.

Humming or music can be soothing.

Look at photos together.

Help them to eat well.

Ask the doctor for help if....

- They get aggressive.
- You feel overwhelmed.

Resources

- Alzheimer's Association; <http://alz.org> or call their helpline 24 hours, 7 days a week (800) 272-3900
- National Down Syndrome Society; <http://ndss.org> or call them (800) 221-4602

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Alzheimer's disease and Related Dementia ~ Care Partner Information

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