



## Care Partner Information

### *Tips for Providing Older Adult Care*

## Unmet Needs in Persons Living with Dementia

Over time, persons living with dementia can find it hard to tell others what they need. They may show frustration about needs that are unmet. They may wander, hit, or refuse care because they may have no other way to let people know what they need. These actions can be hard for care partners. If these actions are common, care partners can feel “burnt out.”

Common Unmet Needs in Persons Living With Dementia	
Pain or discomfort	Tiredness
Hunger or thirst	Sadness or depression
Loneliness	Toileting
Boredom	Dental, vision or hearing care needs

Finding out what the person needs can help stop these actions. Ask family, friends, and other care partners to help.

**Check basic needs first**, such as toileting, hunger, thirst and pain.

**Find what may be causing the person to act the way they are.** Pay attention to the time of day or location of the action. Think about what is going on around them, such as too much noise, or bright lights that may cause scary shadows. Think about the person’s habits, and what they like. This may give a clue about their needs, and what may be causing the actions.

**Understand what started it—often called a “trigger.”** Make note of anything that makes the actions better or worse. Keep track of changes to the person’s medical condition or medications that might cause the actions. How the care partner responds to the actions may also make it better or worse.

Learning what needs are not being met takes time and can be frustrating. For some persons living with dementia, these actions may continue even if all of their needs are met.

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](http://www.aging.arizona.edu)

## Care Partner Information

Many strong feelings can come up when giving care, such as anger. Often care partners don't feel like they have time to take care of themselves and their feelings. If strong feelings go on, care partners may stop treating the person with care and respect. Follow these steps to help with strong emotions:

### **Step 1. Be aware of feelings that may change how care is given.**

Pay close attention to physical signs of strong feelings, such as knots in the stomach, a stiff jaw, or making fists with the hands. When a strong feeling is felt, try to name the feeling. Think about the cause. The feeling may be from something other than caregiving, such as a fight with a friend. Or, it may be caused by something that happened in the past with the person needing care. Naming a feeling and what may have caused it can make it less scary.

### **Step 2. Take care of feelings.**

Once a care partner notes a feeling that may get in the way of good care, it is important to address it. A few slow deep breaths may help the care partner to calm down. At times, the care partner may need to take a break from caregiving. If no one else is available to give care, make sure the person's basic needs are met, and that they are safe. Then, take a moment alone to calm the strong feelings, and lower the stress.

### **Step 3. Make a plan.**

Think about what can be done to deal with stress when caregiving. It may be listening to a favorite song. It may be making plans to do something you like. Taking time away from caregiving helps to lower stress.

<b>Good ways to lower stress</b>
Change locations. Go for a walk in a park or go to a store.
Stay active.
Make time for things that are enjoyable. Read, watch a movie, or spend time with friends or family.
Think of something to be thankful for each day.

### **Step 4. Be kind to yourself.**

The person with dementia is doing the best they can. Care partners should try not to take the actions personally. They should remind themselves that they are giving the best care they can.

**Written By: Debbie Dyjak RN, BSN, MS**

Care Partner Information ~ Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Edited by an interprofessional team from the University of Arizona Center on Aging