



Sometimes, hoarding is a symptom of dementia. The person may have great difficulty throwing away or giving away items. Their possessions can build up in the home over time. This behaviour can be harmless but too much clutter can become a health and safety issue. You may be wondering:

Why do people with dementia hoard?

- Over the years, the person may have accumulated things that are important to them. They feel attached to their possessions, regardless of the value.
- Hoarding can relieve feelings of stress or anxiety.
- Hoarding may help the person feel like they are in control of their lives.
- Memory loss can cause hoarding behaviour. They may try to replace items that no longer need replacing.
- Stockpiling might have been important in their past. If they grew up in a time or place of scarcity, this may be a normal behaviour that has resurfaced.

What might be making symptoms worse?

- **Isolation.** The person might be lonely. Their possessions may give them a sense of safety and connection.
- **Confusion.** Hoarding can be a sign that the person is having trouble with a task. For example, a pile of unopened mail might mean that the person no longer knows how to sort through it.
- **Loss.** Losing friends, family, or a meaningful role in life can increase hoarding. The person may fear their memories will be lost without evidence of the past.
- **Fear.** A fear of being robbed is common for persons with dementia. The person may hide their possession, forget the hiding place, and then replace the item.

How do I approach the person about their behaviour?

The first step is to ask yourself if the behaviour is causing harm. If not, it is possible to ignore the behaviour. But try not to ignore the person. Hoarding is often a sign of an underlying emotion.

Here are some communication tips to help support the person:

- **Address the feeling, not the behaviour.** When a person is hoarding, it can be a sign that they feel anxious, confused, isolated, or fearful. Try not to scold them for the behaviour. Instead, offer reassurance and comfort.
- **Be compassionate.** Hoarding is a response to the dementia. It is not something they can control.
- **Stay calm.** Clutter can be frustrating. The person is probably unaware that it is a problem. Arguing can only lead to defensiveness and loss of trust between you.
- **Avoid using logic.** Reasoning with the person or explaining the problem does not usually end the behaviour.
- **Seek medical advice** if the behaviour seems out of control. There could be other underlying health reasons for increased hoarding behaviour.

For more communication tips, visit: <https://www.caregiver.org/communication-dementia>

Are there ways to manage hoarding behaviours?

Understanding why the behaviour is happening is the key to coping. There are many ways to approach challenging behaviours. For tips, read the Understanding Behavior Changes fact sheet, available [Here](#).

When cleaning, only remove what is needed to make the place safe to live. Below are some strategies to try:

- **Keep the person involved.** If the person wants to help remove the clutter, give them one box at a time to sort through. Take breaks often.
- **Take pictures** of the items you remove and give the pictures to the person with dementia.
- **Create a memory box.** This can be a place to store the special items that the person likes to collect.
- **Check their favourite hiding places.** The person might have lost something by trying to keep it safe.
- **Put away important documents** if the person tends to hide items.
- **Label** drawers, closet, or individual items so that the person can find their belongings.
- **Keep a spare** set of items like glasses or keys that are often lost.
- **Reduce** the number of available closets or drawers in the home.
- **Replace.** If you suspect boredom may be making hoarding worse, find meaningful activities to do. For a list of activities to do at home, [Click Here](#).

Where can I get more help and information?

- **A Dementia Care Coach** can also help you find strategies and resources that fit your unique situations: <https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/dementia-care-coach/>
- Watch this **Webinar**: <https://youtu.be/Ys55HhyrWZO>
- Hear more about strategies from **Teepa Snow**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpXeeFZ2jAM&t=57s>
- Sign up for free Dementia Society events: <https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/ottawa-programs/>
 - For more information about behavioural and psychological symptoms, register for **Dementia Basics**.
 - For more information on support strategies and approaches, register for **Supporting Dementia**.
 - To connect with others facing similar situations, register for a **caregiver support group**.

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