



We all forget things from time to time, but the memory loss that happens with dementia is different. When someone has dementia, forgetfulness affects their ability to do familiar tasks. The person may have difficulty finding their way home, remembering words, or completing activities. With dementia, the person's memory becomes worse over time.

If you or someone you know is living with dementia, you may be wondering:

How does memory work?

The brain is made up of at least 100 billion neurons, also known as brain cells. As we grow older, these neurons become 'wired' to each other based on the things we learn and experience. Through these neuron connections, we remember who we are and how to do things.

How does dementia affect memory?

We lose neuron connections in our brain all the time. It is a natural process. But when someone has dementia, they are losing more neuron connections than normal. This might be due to a brain condition like Alzheimer's disease or Vascular disease.

When connections are lost, it is harder to store new information. You may notice that the person has trouble remembering recent events. Over time, more brain areas become affected by the disease. When this happens, the person is unable to access older memories.

- For more information on the causes of dementia, [Click Here](#).

Some types of dementia affect memory more than others. Sometimes, memory loss is one of the first signs of dementia. In other cases, memory loss comes later in the disease.

- Visit the "About Dementia" section for more information on the types of dementia: [Click Here](#).

What can I expect?

- **Memory loss and confusion can be mild at first.** The person may be aware of changes in their memory and frustrated by it. Decision-making may become harder. The person may repeat themselves or take longer to do daily activities.
- **As dementia progresses, recent events are harder to remember.** It is harder to recognize familiar people and places. This can make the person feel lost. Some people have difficulty remembering words or lose track of time.
- **The person might forget that they are forgetting.** This is called “Anosognosia.” Over time, they may not remember that they have dementia or memory loss. When this happens, reminding them will not help them remember.
- **Over time, older memories start to fade.** The person may forget things from their past including skills that they learned a long time ago. They may forget how to eat or speak. They will eventually need help with most activities of daily living.

How can I help someone living with memory loss?

There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach for helping someone with dementia. Memory loss symptoms can look different for different people. Below are some strategies to try:

When memory loss is mild:

- **Reminders or cues can help.** Try a written note on the fridge to remind the person to eat. Label cupboards so that they can find items easily. Use “To Do” lists, grocery lists, and appointment books.
- **Encourage activities** like reading, crosswords, and puzzles to keep their mind active.
- **Exercise and socialize.** Stay active and reminisce about events that the person can remember.
- **Learn communication tips** to help connect with the person. Visit: <https://www.caregiver.org/communication-dementia>

When memory loss progresses:

- You might notice changes in the person’s behaviour. There are things you can do to help. For strategies, the following fact sheets are located [Here](#):
 - “How to Help Someone with Daily Activities”
 - “How to Promote Engagement in Activities”
 - “Repetitive Behaviours”
 - “Wandering”
- **Consider in-home help if needed.** For more information, read the “Preparing for In-Home Help and Support” fact sheet, located [Here](#).
- **Seek support.** No one should face dementia alone.
 - Talk to a dementia care coach about your unique caregiving situation: <https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/dementia-care-coach/>
 - Connect with others facing similar situations. Register for a caregiver support group or sign up for Dementia Society workshops: <https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/ottawa-programs/>

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Charitable Registration 11878 5013 RR0001