



Caring for Someone with Dementia: How to Recognize When More Help Is Needed

Caring for a loved one with dementia is a meaningful and often rewarding journey, but it is also one of the most challenging roles a person can take on. Over time, the needs of someone living with dementia grow, and the demands on caregivers can feel overwhelming. Recognizing the signs that it may be time to seek professional help is not about giving up — it is about ensuring safety, preserving dignity, and protecting your own well-being as a caregiver. This guide will help you notice changes in your loved one, acknowledge your own needs, and explore how professional care can support both of you.

Signs Your Loved One May Need More Support

As dementia advances, one person or even one family may not be able to safely meet all needs. These are some important signs that your loved one may benefit from additional or professional care:

- **Wandering and safety risks:** Leaving the home unexpectedly, becoming lost even in familiar areas, or forgetting to turn off appliances. Frequent falls or unsafe behaviors may indicate constant supervision is needed.
- **Communication difficulties:** Trouble expressing themselves or understanding others. Miscommunication may cause frustration and increase stress for both of you.
- **Decline in judgment and abstract thinking:** Poor decision-making, unpaid bills, confusion with numbers, or ignoring medical needs. These patterns can place them at risk of harm or financial trouble.
- **Daily activities becoming too hard:** Needing significant help with personal care like bathing, dressing, eating, or toileting. If these tasks require more than you can manage, it is time to seek assistance.
- **Incontinence and medical needs:** Frequent bladder or bowel accidents, difficulties following medication schedules, or complex medical needs like injections or wound care that you cannot provide safely.
- **Behavioral changes:** Increased aggression, agitation, nighttime wandering, or refusal of care. These behaviors can be distressing and unsafe for caregivers to manage alone.
- **Social withdrawal:** No longer engaging in meaningful activities, hobbies, or conversation. This isolation affects well-being and can sometimes be improved with professional support.

- **Need for 24-hour care:** Late-stage dementia often requires round-the-clock assistance. If your loved one cannot be left alone safely, professional care may be the best option.

- **Sudden Changes:** Not every change is part of dementia itself. Sometimes a new or sudden change may mean something else is happening and deserves quick attention (e.g., sudden increase in confusion that is different from their usual pattern; high fever or signs they may be sick; fall that causes injury or a sudden change in how they move; suddenly having trouble speaking, walking, or using one side of the body). It's important to bring these types of sudden changes to the attention of a health professional promptly.

Signs You (the Caregiver) May Need Help

Your health and resilience are just as important as the care you give. Ignoring your own needs can lead to burnout, depression, and even illness. Look for these signs that you may need more support:

- **Exhaustion and lack of sleep:** Constant fatigue, waking many times during the night, or rarely feeling rested.
- **Neglecting your health:** Missing your own medical appointments, eating poorly, or becoming sick more often.
- **Persistent stress or depression:** Feeling overwhelmed, angry, hopeless, or resentful on most days. Crying frequently or losing interest in things you once enjoyed may indicate burnout.
- **Isolation:** Turning down invitations, losing touch with friends, or abandoning hobbies. Loneliness increases caregiver stress and impacts your mental health.
- **Overloaded responsibilities:** Struggling to balance caregiving with work, parenting, or household tasks. If you feel you can no longer manage, this is a clear signal to seek help.
- **Burnout:** Feeling emotionally drained, unsafe, or unable to continue caregiving without extra support.

How Professional Help Can Support You

Professional help does not replace your role — it adds to it. Bringing in extra support can relieve stress, improve safety, and give both you and your loved one a better quality of life:

- **Expert dementia care:** Professionals understand memory loss, behavior changes, and care needs. They can provide reliable help with meals, hygiene, medications, and mobility.
- **Respite and breaks:** In-home care, respite stays, or adult day programs give you time to rest, work, or simply recharge.
- **Preserving relationships:** Outside help allows you to focus more on being a spouse, child, or friend rather than just a caregiver.
- **Practical strategies and safety tips:** Occupational therapists or nurses can suggest home modifications, safe movement techniques, and activities that engage your loved one.
- **Support for you:** Counseling, caregiver education, and peer groups can reduce stress, ease guilt, and give encouragement from others who understand.

Next Steps for Caregivers

If you recognize these signs, taking the first step toward help can feel overwhelming. Here are some practical ways to begin accessing support:

- Talk with your doctor: Share what you are experiencing, for both your loved one and yourself. Ask for referrals to specialists, home care programs, or social workers.
- Connect with the Alzheimer Society or caregiver organizations: They offer support groups, helplines, respite options, and education.
- Start small: Try a few hours of in-home help or an adult day program each week to ease into accepting support.
- Explore in-home care options: Personal support workers, nursing care, and household help can reduce your workload.
- Plan for the future: If your loved one's needs are high or constant, begin exploring long-term care or memory care facilities early. Joining waitlists ahead of time can reduce stress later.

You Are Not Alone

Recognizing the need for professional help can stir up feelings of guilt or grief, but seeking support is an act of responsibility and love. Many caregivers find that with help, they feel healthier, their relationships improve, and their loved one is cared for with greater comfort and safety. Remember: you are not alone in this journey — support is available.

Helpful Websites for People Living with Dementia and Their Caregivers

Alzheimer Society Southwest Partners: <https://alzswp.ca/>

Provides comprehensive support across Southwestern Ontario through personalized counselling, dementia education workshops, peer-led caregiver support groups, and their First Link® program. They offer direct assistance in navigating community resources, accessing local dementia-friendly activities, and planning for ongoing dementia care needs.

Health Services for the South West region of Ontario: <https://www.southwesthealthline.ca/>

A regional directory that lets you freely search for nearby dementia day programs, respite beds, transportation and caregiver-support services across the South West.

This brochure is part of ClarityPath's commitment to supporting caregivers with accessible, evidence-informed resources.

Visit <https://claritypath.ca/> for more tools and guides.
