

Making the most of respite care

2.6

CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH DEMENTIA

This Help Sheet discusses some of the ways that families and carers can make respite care a positive experience for themselves and for the person with dementia. It provides some practical suggestions for planning and using respite.

Using respite care

Respite care provides a needed break from the responsibilities and demands of caring for someone with dementia. It enables families and carers to have a rest, go out, attend to business or go on a holiday. Many people find that a regular break means that they can recharge and avoid burn out. It also gives a person with dementia an opportunity to socialise and meet other people.

The Government funds many different types of respite to help families and carers. If you want to know more about what respite is available in your area there are a number of organisations that can help you.

Alzheimer's Australia offers information, support, education and counselling. The National Dementia Helpline can be contacted on **1800 100 500** or visit Alzheimer's Australia at www.alzheimers.org.au

Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres around Australia provide information about the range of community care programs and services available to help people stay in their own homes. Call **1800 052 222** or visit www.commcarelink.health.gov.au

Commonwealth Carer Resource Centres provide carers with information and advice about relevant services and entitlements. Contact your closest Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre on **1800 242 636**.

Dealing with any difficulties

Occasionally difficulties can arise, particularly when using respite for the first time. Some families and carers find that the person with dementia does not wish to leave them or leave home for a break, or that they want to come

home whilst using respite. Other families and carers are concerned about uncharacteristic behaviours that occur when using respite or the effects on a person with dementia after respite.

These problems are not unusual and should not stop you taking a break. There are many ways to manage these difficulties so that you and the person you are caring for can make the most of respite care.

What to try

Planning ahead

Many people with dementia find new environments and new people unsettling. Because of this it is important to plan for a positive respite experience.

Many people have found it useful to use regular respite early in the care situation, so that everyone can get used to sharing dementia care.

You will know best how far in advance to tell the person about respite. Reassure the person if they are anxious and make sure that they know that you are feeling positive about the break, even if you're feeling a little anxious yourself.

Start with small breaks

Many families and carers find it best to start with small breaks and build up to longer ones. This enables both of you to gain some confidence about the experience. It may be useful to have an initial time with the person with dementia and the worker prior to the break.

Communication with respite staff

It can be helpful to think about respite as a partnership between yourself and the respite provider, working together to make the most of respite.

Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**

Visit Alzheimer's Australia at www.alzheimers.org.au

When planning to use respite discuss with the staff the type of respite that is available and what will work best for you and the person with dementia.

To make respite work for all of you:

- Communicate your needs and the needs of the person with dementia clearly and openly
- Give important information to the respite worker or facility. Knowing the individual likes and dislikes of the person will help staff care more easily, and will help minimise any changes. Share historical information about their life. Some people find that sending a life story photo album or board works well as an aid to conversation
- Explain what is important to you and the person with dementia about the care they receive

Talking with others

You might get some practical ideas by talking with other people in a similar situation about ways they've managed to make respite a positive experience.

Keep trying

Respite is an adjustment for families and carers and the person with dementia and it can take time to build a sense of trust. If you're not happy with the respite experience – try again. The person you are caring for may well get used to different things over time. Perhaps planning to do something differently next time will improve the experience. Remember that regular breaks are important for all families, carers and people with dementia. You will almost certainly enhance your ability to carry out the demanding role of caring for someone with dementia – so keep trying.



Further Information

Alzheimer's Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**.

The Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS) is a national telephone advisory service for families, carers and care workers who are concerned about the behaviours of people with dementia. The service provides confidential advice, assessment, intervention, education and specialised support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and can be contacted on **1800 699 799**.

For further information and to view other Help Sheets visit our website at www.alzheimers.org.au