How Can I Support Someone with Dementia?

Persons with dementia can continue to live and function independently for some time. As the disease progresses over time, their ability to handle daily tasks may dwindle. A person with dementia might become agitated when once-simple tasks become difficult or impossible. Caring for those with dementia requires empathy, patience and special care. Caregivers have the ability to limit some of those challenges and ease frustration by:

- **Scheduling Wisely** – Offer structure and routine to make each day more predictable and less confusing. Schedule the most difficult tasks such as bathing or doctor appointments for the time of day the resident tends to be most calm and agreeable.

- **Take Your Time** – Simple tasks once accomplished in seconds may take minutes now to complete. Plan accordingly and schedule more time to complete tasks so the resident is not rushed, which leads to frustration and agitation. Planning and patience are the keys.

- **Give Control Back** – Allow the resident to do as much as possible with the least amount of assistance. Simple tasks such as grooming or getting dressed alone can give them a strong sense that they are still in control of themselves.

- **Limit Choices** – The fewer the options, the easier it is for the resident to decide. For example, provide two outfits to choose between, instead of a closet full of clothes.

- **Provide Simple Instructions** – When giving directions or instructions, keep them simple but specific. Instead of “let’s get ready for bed”, offer them simple but specific instructions. “Let’s brush our teeth” and then “let’s wash our face” and then “let’s put our pajamas on”.

- **Reduce Distractions** – Turn off the TV and minimize other distractions at mealtime and during conversations, so the resident can better focus on the task at hand.

- **Be Flexible** – The resident’s ability to function and cope may decline over time. Be flexible and adapt their routine as needed. If their favorite food becomes unappealing, adjust the menu. If they insist on wearing the same outfit every day, consider buying a few identical outfits.

- **Make Things Familiar** – Residents with dementia oftentimes struggle with things that are new or different. It requires additional time for them to process this new task or setting which can lead to frustration. Keep surroundings familiar. Don’t make radical changes to their room layout or daily tasks.

- **Encourage and Reassure Frequently** – Positive and reassuring comments help foster confidence that the resident is doing the right thing; they are in control. Thank them for getting dressed or brushing their teeth. Doing the task right and providing positive reinforcement helps them feel like they are still in charge.

- **Create Calm and Safety** – Remain calm at all times. You become a mirror to dementia. Providing a calming environment will lead to calm dementia.