

Resources

The Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest Washington's Caregiver Corner

Caring for a loved one with early-stage dementia

By Patti Atkins

Receiving a diagnosis of dementia can be frightening for the patient and for their loved ones. If the disease is diagnosed in the early stages, there are things you and your loved one can do to mitigate the effects while they are still able to and ensure they have a voice in their care.



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Get Informed

One of the most frightening things about a dementia diagnosis is fear of the unknown. Combat that by helping your loved one gather information about the different types of dementia, how they manifest themselves, and what to expect at different stages of the disease. Check with your loved one’s doctor for references they would recommend.

A lot of information is available online, including “Dementia Road Map: A Guide for Family and Care Partners” developed by the Dementia Action Collaborative (DAC) in Washington State (www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/dementia-action-collaborative) that is highly recommended.

When looking for other information online, just make sure you use a reputable source, such as the Alzheimer’s Association (www.alz.org), which has many informational resources. The National Institutes of Health (www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication) also publishes several fact sheets and free booklets with information about Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias.

Be Supportive

In the early stages of dementia, the signs and symptoms may not be apparent to anyone except those closest to your loved one. They will continue to function independently, possibly for years after their diagnosis. One of the most important things you can do at this stage is to provide love and support. Enable them to share their fears and concerns about the future or vent their anger about the diagnosis.

Assist your loved one in developing cues and reminders to help with memory. Sticky notes, labels, and calendar planners will become valuable tools for helping your loved one retain their independence.

Plan Ahead

Cognitive decline will occur with dementia, but it won’t happen immediately. Take this time to help your loved one investigate resources and providers for people with dementia in your community so they know what is available before they need it.

Keep your loved one involved and listen to their opinions and preferences for care so you know how to proceed when care is needed.

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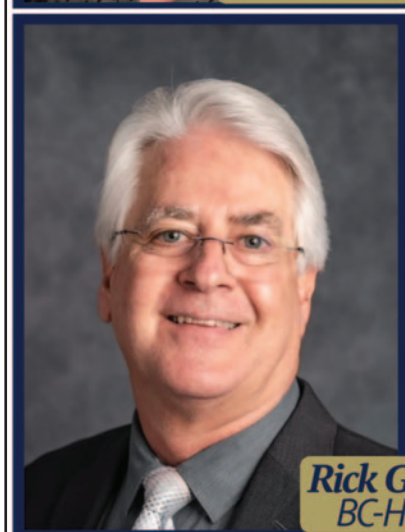
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