

For families and carers

- coping with stress associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown measures.

Introduction

Our shared responsibilities in minimising the spread of Coronavirus, and protecting those who are most vulnerable, currently affects the lives of each one of us in many ways. Essential responses such as; social distancing, self-isolation, quarantine and shielding, are disrupting the normal pattern of life and may bring additional concerns and challenges to many people experiencing dementia, their families and carers. You can find a guide on Coronavirus written specifically for people with dementia and carers [here](#).

Many of the community services providing support, therapeutic activity, respite and companionship have been cancelled temporarily. With uncertainty about how long safeguarding and infection control measures will require to be in place, many are finding this a stressful time.

Everyone's situation is different so there can be no standard response to alleviating stress, but you may find some of the following suggestions and resources helpful.

Stay reliably informed

Keep yourself informed and focus on reliable, good quality advice around Coronavirus. It is important to be aware of official guidance that applies to us all, and that which applies to your specific situation, so that you keep yourself and others safe but not unnecessarily restricted. Consider keeping up to date with any changes to guidance through limited reliable sources each day, such as [NHS Inform](#), the [UK government](#) and the Scottish Government daily update on Covid-19 broadcasts.



It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the continuous stream of news and social media coverage. For all its value, social media does host a wealth of inaccurate information which, if absorbed, could be a source of unnecessary worry.

Reassure yourself that this is a temporary period of measures to slow the spread of the virus and things will return to normal. Also, consider the fact that efforts made by you are helping others in your community to avoid contracting the virus.

Social media is however useful as a way to stay connected with others important to you, such as friends, family, local community supports and Alzheimer Scotland.

Stay connected

Whilst our Dementia Resource Centres, services and activity groups cannot operate as normal, Alzheimer Scotland is making every effort to stay in touch and provide adapted forms of support. Connections are being maintained in a variety of ways, including through our:

- 24-hour freephone dementia Helpline 0808 808 3000
- [Alzheimer Scotland website](#) where you can access our [online support page](#) including weekly online occupational therapy and physiotherapy clinics
- Facebook (Alzheimer Scotland) and Twitter accounts (@alzscot) which will share details of online surgeries, updated guidance, video groups and share a number of accounts which can also support you, such as Allied Health Professions (@AHPDementia on twitter, facebook and instagram).

Although it is not possible currently to have visitors, or visit others in the usual way, try to stay connected with family and friends in any way you can – by phone or videocall, for example, via Skype, WhatsApp, Facetime or Zoom. Loss of contact between the generations in your family can be particularly hard. Maintaining connection, even if not face to face, is still important. Grandparents and grandchildren, for example, could share news of the day's activities, sing a song together or children could show off a drawing or a new skill during a videocall.

Stay well – support your physical and mental well-being

Looking after your own physical health and well-being, and that of the person living with dementia, are equally important as they are intimately linked. If you are the main source of support for someone with dementia your health and well-being is essential to their health and happiness – it is not selfish to think about looking after yourself.

Changes in the usual pattern and structure of the day can be stressful for anyone and especially so for someone with dementia. The withdrawal or changes to usual routines and activities (or carers) may lead to the person with dementia feeling bored or more anxious and insecure, all of which could be communicated through changes in behaviour or mood. It can be helpful to think about the underlying need (e.g. bored, anxious) rather than any resultant behaviour (e.g. restless or withdrawn) as it will direct you towards potentially helpful solutions rather than unhelpful reactions or conflict.

A new resource is available from occupational therapists in partnership with designers which focuses on occupation and routine in response to people needing to stay at home and the potential increase in stress resulting from that. It is available [here](#).

Resources are posted every Tuesday and Friday and this is a resource that will remain after the current pandemic and you can email us at AHPconnectingpeople@gmail.com if you want to find out more or ask us a question.

Consider how some new routines and structure can be created to replace some of what has temporarily changed or is missing. Having a plan and establishing a routine to your day can be helpful but equally, in these extraordinary times, 'letting go' of some things that don't really matter can also be important. Healthy perspectives tend to be easier when we look after ourselves and are well rested. Listening is often more helpful than persuading and it frequently pays off to stop, change tack and come back another time to something that is causing friction.

If the person you are supporting finds it hard to understand or remember the need to behave differently at present (e.g. maintaining social distance, staying at home and frequent hand washing), some memory aids with key messages in words and pictures may help. [Alzheimer Scotland's guidance for people with dementia and carers](#) includes accessible information and pictures. You may also find it helpful to include and prompt the person you are supporting when you are washing your own hands more frequently, e.g. 'Let's wash our hands'.

Staying active, eating, sleeping and exercising

Although we must all stay mainly at home at present, some outdoor time (within Government guidelines) is good for your physical and mental wellbeing and is likely to aid a healthy sleep pattern. Outdoor exercise might be around the garden if you have one or by going for a short, local daily walk. If you must remain totally indoors, or cannot get out, consider how some gentle exercise can be introduced to the pattern of your day. Chair exercises can be fun and suitable for all levels of ability. [See here](#).



Think about adapting the way that household chores are undertaken. Even better if this can be shared with other members of the household, including the person with dementia, choosing tasks the person is capable of completing. Breaking any task down into step by step chunks might make it easier to think about how the person with dementia can be included.

Try to eat healthily. Making food from scratch will not only be better for your health but may also provide another opportunity to carry out an activity together. Again, if the process of meal preparation is broken down into steps it might be easier to consider the ways in which the person with dementia might contribute – e.g. preparing vegetables or ingredients for baking. There's nothing wrong with having a break from cooking either and some home delivery meal options are still available. It's worth checking if favourite local businesses are adapting their operations too.

Other activities you might enjoy together include:

- listening to music, singing together, perhaps some old favourites; <https://musicmemories.bbcrewind.co.uk> or consider creating a personal playlist; <https://www.playlistforlife.org.uk/> If you already have an app like Spotify or Apple Music, you can also create a playlist there.
- reading aloud or listening to an audiobook – these can be downloaded for free using the local library app www.borrowbox.com/
- watching a favourite movie or looking through pictures together. The BBC have some excellent reminiscence resources <https://remarc.bbcrewind.co.uk>

A wide range of other suggested activities at home can be found in these resources:

<https://healthinnovationnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Maintaining-Activities-for-Older-Adults-during-COVID19.pdf>

<https://www.londontheatre1.com/theatre-news/coronavirus-20-things-to-do-at-home-during-lockdown/>

Accept help when offered and seek help when needed

It is often very difficult for us to ask for or accept help. It is not in most people's nature to do so but these are exceptional times and we all need to support each other to get through this. Neighbours, local community groups, voluntary and statutory organisations can all assist in ensuring you have access to essential supplies such as groceries and medicines. If you are unsure of local support arrangements, we can help you with this information – please get in touch with us, either through your existing local contact or our 24 hour Freephone Helpline (0808 808 3000). Alternatively, try searching the [Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisation's Community Assistance Directory](#) (non-medical):



If you feel low, stressed or anxious

If you do already feel low, stressed or anxious, this may or may not relate to supporting someone with dementia. Perhaps these feelings are not new but exacerbated by the current situation. [Breathing space](#) is a confidential phonenumber for any adult in Scotland experiencing these feelings.



NHS 24 Mental Health Hub is operational 7 nights a week from 18:00 to 02:00. It can be reached at those times by dialling 111 during those times.

Chaplains and priests are still available within Scotland's Health Boards and can offer support as described in this [Greater Glasgow and Clyde video](#).

Build your resilience and ability to cope with stress

Firstly, accept that in these unusual times and circumstances there are occasions when you are likely to feel stressed and that is perfectly normal. Preventing and coping with stress are things we can get better at with learned techniques, personal strategies and practice!

There is a wealth of free online resources to help you develop your ability to calm your mind through meditation and mindfulness techniques. Mostly these rely on learning to be 'in the moment', simple breathing techniques and giving attention to the breath, so no other equipment required – just you.

If this is something that's new to you, here's [a simple box breathing exercise](#). 'LinkedIn' have developed 6 new [free courses to manage stress and build mindfulness into your 'new normal'](#).



Being prepared

It is difficult for any of us to be sure of how long the pattern of our normal lives will be disrupted by the measures to curb the spread of the virus and the lack of control over the situation is one aspect that can make it stressful. It may help to take charge of what we can, including:

- having those conversations with family members which we may have put off previously, such as discussions around making an advance plan for future changes and decisions around our health and capacity – something we should all think about. Guidance is available [here](#).
- being prepared for a sudden change in your own health or the person you are supporting. This might mean having relevant numbers to hand and preparing for any [possible admission to hospital](#).

Any one of us could experience a health issue which is completely unrelated to coronavirus. It is important not to ignore other symptoms and be aware you can, and should, still call your GP team or NHS24 by dialling 111 if you are worried about any family member. If you experience an emergency health situation or where there is immediate risk of harm to yourself, the person you are supporting, or others, call 999.

Alzheimer Scotland are continuing to make sure nobody faces dementia alone during this time. If you need information, emotional support or just someone to talk to please call our Freephone Dementia Helpline anytime. It's available 24 hours a day on 0808 808 3000.

