

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS TO HELP COPE WITH DEMENTIA OR MEMORY LOSS

1. Clean up clutter around the house. This should be scheduled routinely into each day. (i.e. kitchen clean up on Monday, bedroom on Tues., etc.). Get rid of unused items, clothing, paper, etc. Clean off table tops. You may want to hire someone to help as this can be a tedious process.
2. Set up an organization system for household paperwork such as bills. Label with words indicating placement of information, mail, important papers, etc. The labels should be large print and easily readable.
3. Put controls on bank accounts and credit cards. You don't want a careless or inappropriate decision to affect financial security.
4. Label places in the home where important items should routinely be kept, i.e. "PURSE" near a hook to place your purse. Label drawers, cupboards, closets, etc. to help your loved one find items or return them to their proper place.
5. Medications need to be monitored! Use pill organizers that organize the pills according to when they are taken. Help your loved one set up the pill box on a weekly basis. Double check to see if each box is emptying appropriately. Do not just take your loved ones word that they have taken their medication. Hide away pill bottles so they do not get back into the bottles and take any unscheduled medication. Alarms or strategically placed reminder notes can be used to remind the person to take their medication.
6. Begin establishing a routine schedule...Monday is clean bedroom and run errands; Tuesday is laundry and go to library; Wednesday is grocery shopping; etc... Predictability helps compensate for memory loss. Write out the routine schedule and hang it up for all to see throughout the day. This schedule should be simplistic and include all activities not just appointments. White, dry erase boards are good for writing the schedule. This should be completed with you and your loved one then reviewed every morning.
7. Sequencing steps through a task can be difficult. Write out simple instructions for doing basic tasks, such as operating a microwave, using a cell phone, etc. Hang the instructions by the product so it is easy to read and follow. The steps should be detailed enough. Have your loved one try following the steps while you are present. Modify the steps as needed. Writing the steps on a computer make them easy to change the print or modify the content.
8. Following a routine hygiene regimen may begin to change in that some steps start to be forgotten (forgets to shave, forgets to wash hair, etc). Write out the steps to be completed and post in the bathroom, maybe on the mirror. It may be helpful to put the items needed to complete the regimen on the bathroom counter. Get rid of or hide any items not needed on a daily basis. If your loved one lives alone, check the shower to see if it is wet or if the towel has been messed with. Is the toothpaste tube changing? If you can, watch the person go through their morning regimen to see if there are any breakdowns in the process.

9. Your loved one's senses may dull over time. They may not recognize offensive body odor, see spilled food on their clothes, see what is in front of them, etc. Their brain does not register information like it used to and certainly not as fast as it used to. Therefore you may need to help them recognize or attend to things.
10. Help your loved one rotate out clothing, replacing dirty clothes with clean clothes. It is not uncommon for a person to wear the same outfit over and over and not remember doing so. Help change over clothes daily or every other day. Lay out clean clothes the night before. Put a hamper in the person's room. Label it "Dirty Clothes".
11. Limit choices of clothing in closets and drawers. That means getting rid of clothing that doesn't fit and is inappropriate to wear. Rotate seasonal clothes as needed. Label drawers/closets if needed (i.e. "SOCKS").
12. A person's repertoire of foods they eat or think of cooking diminishes over time. It may be helpful to list some meals that the person can easily prepare and hang it on the refrigerator. For example, DINNERS- spaghetti and salad; meatloaf, potatoes, and corn; soup and sandwich; tuna noodle casserole and broccoli; etc.
13. If your loved one lives alone, you will need to monitor the food. Are there dirty dishes or a dishwasher full of dishes? Does the refrigerator content appear to change? Is there spoiled food not being thrown away? Leaving prepared, plated meals does not guarantee your loved one will be able to select, heat and consume the food. Difficulty with identification of hunger and planning for even simple meal preparation may be a factor. Meals on Wheels could be an option.
14. Breakdown large tasks into manageable parts. Have your loved one do 1 part of a multi-step task. For example, instead of having them do all the grocery shopping, have them responsible for choosing the fruits and vegetables. Instead of having them pay all the bills, sit together and have them write out the checks while you enter them in the checkbook. For cooking, have them make one part of the meal such as the salad or the side dish. The goal is to keep the person active in all parts of daily activities as much as possible. It may be necessary to do the tasks side by side in order to keep the person focused and productive.
15. Budgeting time can be tricky. A person with a memory loss or who has difficulty thinking needs extra time to understand what is being said to them, to make sense of what is going on around them or to think of what to do next. Allow extra time to do all tasks. Making a person rush adds to the frustration and confusion.
16. Encourage completion of a task with verbal guidance and praise versus doing for them. Adopt the idea of doing *just enough*.
17. Do mental stimulation activities such as play cards, games, Bingo, etc. It may take some trial and error with games to see if the level of complexity is too much. You do not need to play a game according to the instructions. Modify the game to their level of ability so that it continues to be entertaining.

18. Create a backup system for information you tell your loved one. That means writing down a request, an appointment, etc. versus just telling them. That is because heard information is easily forgotten. When asking a loved one to do something, think through "How likely is it that he/she is going to remember what I told/asked them?". If not likely, either you or your loved one should write a reminder note and post it in an obvious place. Keep the print fairly large and the message simple. Beware of posting too many notes. Get rid of old notes.
19. Is your loved one forgetting names of family members and friends? Put together some photos and label them with names. They can be in frames or in a photo album. It is best to have families together in the same photos so your loved one can reference who they are and how they know them. Labeling can be done in creative and clever ways.
20. For social gatherings, have your loved one write names on a 3x5 card for people they want to remember. Have them keep the card in their pocket or purse so they can look at it frequently during the event.
21. Keep family get-togethers small and simple. Too much noise can be overwhelming and result in withdrawal or anger.
22. Have family and friends watch use of humor, facial expressions, body language etc. as this can give off the wrong, unintended message. This can happen with watching t.v. where much of the language is implied and full of innuendoes. Your loved one may not comprehend what is being said however recognizes an angry voice, rolling eyes, laughter, etc. Keep communication concrete.
23. Unfortunately, answers to questions from your loved one cannot always be taken as accurate. To them they feel the information is right however due to memory problems they may be remembering the wrong thing, wrong day or wrong event, etc. Be a spy and double check!
24. Change your behavior from asking questions of your loved one to having them show you or demonstrate their ability. "Show me you can use your cell phone". "Show me you can organize the mail, write a bill, drive to the store, get money from a bank ...". You may be surprised how difficult the task has become. Your loved one may be too embarrassed to let you know or they may not remember that they are struggling.
25. Out of sight can become out of mind. This can be used in a variety of ways. If you need your loved one to stop using something, put it away (for example, keys to a car). Likewise if you want the person to use an item, having it in a drawer or closet may make it hard for them to remember where it is. Set the item(s) out in plain sight.

Be flexible! Be creative! Be patient!
Recognize abilities and behaviors can change quickly.
The person is likely doing the best they can.
They are afraid too.