

Australian version

iSupport For Dementia

Training and support manual
for carers of people with dementia



Unit 3. Using memory aids in your care activities

Memory loss

Why is this learning unit important?

Memory loss can be frustrating for the person with dementia and result in repetitive behaviour including repetitive vocalisations. As a carer, you may feel frustrated when reacting to repetitive behaviour.

How will this learning unit help me?

In this learning unit you will practice several ways to respond to memory loss and find out what may help you deal with the person's increasing forgetfulness.

What will I learn?

- Memory loss is common in people with dementia
- Different ways to deal with memory loss
- Not to blame the person with dementia because memory loss is part of the disease.

What is memory loss?

People with dementia will increasingly lose their memory over time.

In the beginning, they may forget recent events, where they put their keys, their wallet or a particular piece of paper. They find it harder to remember phone numbers, important dates and appointments.

However, past memories, like childhood memories, are often preserved for a longer period of time.

Does the person you care for forget things sometimes?

If so, what kinds of things does the person you care for forget?



Check your understanding



Forgetting to buy groceries

Anne often forgets what she needs to buy from the shops. Anne is living with dementia, and she has a daughter named Maya. When Maya goes to visit Anne's house, she notices that the fridge/cupboard is empty. Anne often forgets what she needs to buy from the shops. Maya becomes worried.

Check your understanding



How would you advise Maya to deal with her mother's memory loss?

Pick from the list below all the responses you think are appropriate and drop them to the box at the right.

- Ask a neighbour to go with Anne once a week to the market to buy groceries.
- Create a memory aid together with Anne, e.g., a list of groceries Anne needs to buy, and put that in a prominent place, so that the list is easy to access.
- Go out and buy groceries immediately.
- Ask: 'Mum, what's wrong with you, there is no food in the house?'
- Sit down with Anne and make a list of groceries. Go shopping together.



ANSWERS - Using memory aids in your care activities

Check your understanding

*How would you advise Maya?*

- ✓ **Ask a neighbour to go with Anne once a week to the market to buy groceries.**

This might be helpful if the neighbour is happy to help Anne. Anne will have groceries and a nice visit with the neighbour.

- ✓ **Create a memory aid together with Anne, e.g. a list of groceries Anne needs to buy, and put that in a prominent place so that the list is easy to access.**

It addresses Anne's memory loss and may become a weekly shared pleasant activity.

- ✗ **Go out and buy groceries immediately.**

This is a short-term solution. Further action will be needed to address the problem long term.

- ✗ **Ask: 'Mum, what's wrong with you, there is no food in the house?'**

Anne cannot help that she forgets to buy food, if critiqued, she may feel embarrassed that she has done something wrong. It does not improve the situation.

- ✓ **Sit down with Anne and make a list of groceries. Go shopping together.**

Maya is addressing her mother's needs. However, she might first want to try another approach. For example, with a list of groceries her mother may still be able to go shopping without help.

Tip

People with dementia often find barriers when shopping. Below you will find some of the problems people with dementia may have with possible solutions.

Problem shopping: Getting to/from the shop on their own

Possible solutions:

Arrange for help with transport such as a friend to go with the person or a taxi service. The person may be eligible for Community Transport and other Commonwealth Home Support Program services or a Home Care Package. For further information call My Aged Care on 1800 200 422.

Problem shopping: Feeling overwhelmed by the people, the size of the shop, the number of aisles and variety of choices.

Possible solutions:

Choose a shop that is smaller; shop on a less busy day (i.e., not Saturday or Sunday); ask for help from a staff.

Problem shopping: Difficulty counting change.

Possible solutions: Ask for the check-out staff to help with the change or use a direct debit or credit card.

Problem shopping: Difficulty remembering what to buy.

Possible solutions: Take a shopping list that is in the order of the aisles in the shop.

Check your understanding

*Forgetting daily activities*

the person living with dementia might forget other things. The same goes for Anne. Have a look at the next example.

Maya and Anne are talking on the phone. Maya notices that Anne often forgets what she has planned for the day. Maya is impatient with Anne and tells her mother 'This is getting worse'.

Maya feels frustrated when her mother forgets daily activities.



What do you think Maya's response should be?
Please select all the responses you think might apply.

- Tell her mother what to do over the phone.
- Tell her mother what day of the week it is and remind her mother what she usually does on that given day. For example, Monday is wash day; Thursday is going to the shops.
- Go straight over and take charge of the situation by ordering her mother around.
- Plan to visit Anne each week and write on a calendar or blackboard the program for the week.
- Call My Aged Care on 1800 200 422 to find out care services to help Anne.

ANSWERS - Using memory aids in your care activities

Check your understanding

*Forgetting daily activities*

- ✓ **Tell her mother what to do over the phone.**
This response may help if Anne can respond to the directions.
- ✓ **Tell her mother what day of the week it is and remind her mother what she usually does on that given day. For example, Monday is wash day; Thursday is going to the shops.**
This response may be a good one because Maya can use this information to remind her mother or write up a diary of daily chores for her mother to refer to.
- ✗ **Go straight over and take charge of the situation by ordering her mother around.**
This disempowers Anne and does not solve the problem long-term.
- ✓ **Plan to visit Anne each week and write on a calendar or blackboard the program for the week.**
This may help Anne to remember.
- ✓ **Call My Aged Care on 1800 200 422 to find out care services to help Anne.**
This is a starting point to help Anne check her eligibility for aged care services and apply for care services to enable her to stay at home as long as possible.

Check your understanding

**Forgetting medications**

Sometimes memory loss can be more serious, as in the next example.

Anne forgets medications.

Maya comes to visit and discovers that Anne is having trouble remembering which medications to take and at what time.



How do you think Maya should respond to this situation?
Select all Maya's responses that you think are appropriate.

- Maya says, 'Mum, how could you forget your medications?', and 'You know you really need them to stay healthy!'
- Maya goes over the medications with her mum as she has time to help her mum. She purchases a pill box and puts the tablets in the box at the right day/time and calls her mum every day to instruct her to take her medications.
- Maya can set medication reminders on Anne's smart phone or program an electronic alarm clock at Anne's home to remind her to take her medication.
- Maya goes through the medicine cabinet, sits down and cries about her mother's memory loss.
- Maya could arrange with Anne's chemist to place her tablets into a medication organiser called a webster pack, some chemists provide this as a free service, others charge a small fee.

ANSWERS - Using memory aids in your care activities

Check your understanding

*Forgetting medications*

- × **Maya says, 'Mum, how could you forget your medications?', and 'You know you really need them to stay healthy!'**

Anne cannot help that she forgets to take her medications. Memory loss is a disease symptom of dementia.

- ✓ **Maya goes over the medications with her mum as she has time to help her mum. She purchases a pill box and puts the tablets in the box at the right day/time and calls her mum every day to instruct her to take her medications.**

This is a good response because this memory aid along with Maya's support might help Anne to take medications at the right day/time. Some pill reminder boxes come with alarms that are pre-set to remind the person to independently take their medications.

- ✓ **Maya can set medication reminders on Anne's smartphone or program an electronic alarm clock at Anne's home to remind her to take her medication.**

This is a good response because this memory aid might help Anne to take medications at the right day/time if Maya has a job where she can't call Anne at the right time.

- × **Maya goes through the medicine cabinet, sits down and cries about her mother's memory loss.**

It is ok to be upset, it can be difficult looking after someone with dementia. However, it doesn't resolve the problem of Anne forgetting to take her medications.

- ✓ **Maya could arrange with Anne's chemist to place her tablets into a medication organiser called a webster pack, some chemists provide this as a free service, others charge a small fee.**

This is a good response because this will support Anne to take the right tablets at the right day/time.

Activity 

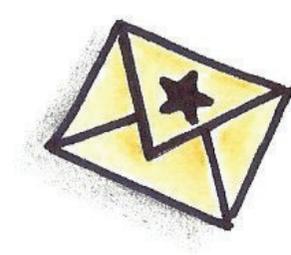
Let's look at your own situation
It is important to relate what you have learnt to your own situation.

You wrote that the person you care for forgets the following:

Activity 

Let's look at your own situation
How could you respond to help the person you care for to deal with memory loss?

This box is for you, like a diary.

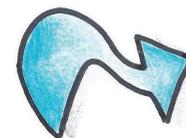


Keep in Mind**Let's review what you have learnt**

- Memory loss is very common for people with dementia.
- Memory loss can be stressful for everyone to deal with.
- In case of memory loss, try a memory aid like a note, calendar, diary, list, pill box, prompt/alarm etc.
- If possible, involve the person living with dementia to find the best way to support them in developing a solution for their memory problems.
- It is important to remember that the person with dementia is not to blame, because they can't help that they forget.
- If one approach doesn't work, try another one.
- Realise there may be good and bad days.
- Remind yourself that memory loss is part of the disease.
- Take a deep breath and think about the best ways to respond that will be least distressing for you and the person you care for in the case of memory loss.

You finished this learning unit, well done!

Would you like to try the following relaxation exercise?





Number counting

You can relax by focusing on your breathing and counting from 20 back to 1.

This is how you do it:

- Sit or lie down comfortably in a quiet place.
- Breathe slowly.
- With each breath, take at least three seconds to breathe in and at least six seconds to breathe out.
- Focus on your breathing and your lower abdomen when you breathe until you feel calm and peaceful inside your heart and mind.
- Say the word 'relax' whenever you breathe out.
- Tell yourself that you will start counting down from 20 to 1.
- Tell yourself that you will double your level of relaxation for each and every count, and you will be totally relaxed when you reach 1.
- Start counting down from 20 to 1 slowly. Say the word 'relax' whenever you count. (That is, take a deep breath, say '20', breathe out slowly and say 'relax', take a deep breath, count '19', breathe out slowly and say 'relax', and so on.)
- Now do this exercise again, but close your eyes.

Further resource

Dementia Australia, <https://www.dementia.org.au/>

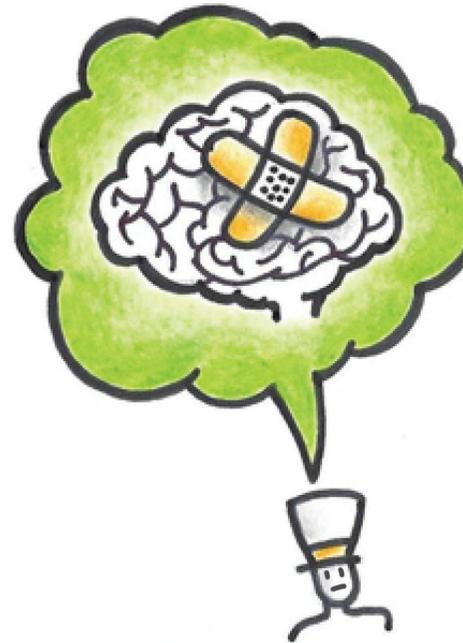
The National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500 is open nationally from 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday excluding public holidays. A message service is available if you call outside operating hours.

My Aged Care <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au>

Carer support groups can sometimes be organised around specific caring roles and the situation of the person you care for. For information about these groups in your area visit the website or, call My Aged Care on 1800 200 422.

RELATED LEARNING UNITS

- Module 3 Unit 3 Thinking differently





You finished this unit, well done!