

“Eating an apple a day keeps the doctor away”, is an old saying, but the analogy may support carers in their daily routines. Creating a routine that supports your current role, and lifestyle is a key strategy in fostering a sense of wellbeing. For many carers, the forming of long-term routines is more important than a perfect adherence to a short-term plan. (It is always important to plan for disruptions and how you can adjust normal routines as needed)

When planning your routine, it can be beneficial to develop a practice where fewer decisions need to be made. Under pressure, when presented with a choice, people often choose the easiest and quickest answer, however they may not produce the best outcomes. It takes time to establish routines, and adding too many changes at once can be difficult to sustain.

Building Your Routine

Think about habits you already have and stack another one on top of an existing one. The initial habit is already hardwired into the brain, so the new habit can be applied more consistently and quickly. This type of approach works by minimising the stress of trying to change too many things at once. New habits should start as an existing trigger(habit) easily connected to a location or time of day, which then acts as a reminder of the new habit.

Example 1: Mr. and Mrs. ABC spend all day inside, and without realizing the day is nearly over, they have not spent any time outside in the sunshine. They find it very difficult to find the time to spend even 5 minutes sitting outside.

Plan – listing their daily habits already in their routine.

1. *Existing Habit:* Eating lunch each day.
2. *Reminder:* Eating lunch at 12.30pm.
3. *The new habit:* Sitting outside in the garden for 5 minutes every afternoon after lunch.

They can now write an additional reminder and stick it in a place which is visible to them. They can also create a sentence that links their new habit to the existing one. Each day, weather permitting they have a reminder to sit outside in the garden for 5 minutes.

Repeat: Consistency is key. Repeating this paired routine is important and helps establish a connection between the old and new habit.

You should expect challenges to come up with any routine. When they do, you have one of two choices: *give up or find a way to overcome them.*

As the progression of dementia takes hold, the ability to understand the reasons for the persons moods becomes limited, however can often be triggered by their surroundings. Whatever is occurring in their presence can be absorbed and mirrored back. Sometimes what is being triggered is the brains desire to be safe, and at this point, carers need to use their rational thoughts to put aside negative feelings about the situation.

Repeated Questioning

Example 2: After mum consistently repeats the same question over and over, XYZ develops an annoyed tone, and tends to lose patience with her.

Healthy Habit: Write a sentence about how you want to respond and read it daily. It may include:

- Taking a breath, giving a couple of seconds prior to responding.
- Trying to keep any negative reaction internal, taking a moment to feel the natural response before reframing what is said aloud.
- During moments of distress, the thing a carer can control is their own reaction.

Then:

- Try to respond to emotions rather than words (Think about what is going on behind the words)
- Keep the answer brief.
- Try distracting with another activity.
- Try some singing or music
- Take a break, it's Okay to take care of yourself, even if it's only walking into the next room for a minute.
- Use tactics that work for both you and the person living with dementia.
- Be mindful that for some people, it may work to answer the question, but for others it may be better to ignore the question.