



LifeHealthNow



When You Begin to Notice Changes

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR
INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

*Understanding Memory Changes
Without Fear*

By

Mark Robertson, RN
FOUNDER, LIFEHEALTHNOW



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LifeHealthNow.org

Dedicated to...

My brother...

My sister...

My sister-in-law...

And to every husband, wife, son, daughter, grandchild, family member, and friend who quietly walks beside someone living with memory loss.

Caregiving is rarely easy.

Much of what you do goes unseen.

Yet every act of patience...

Every reassuring word...

Every shared smile...

Every hand held...

Every moment of kindness...

Matters more than you may ever know.

May this guide offer encouragement, practical guidance, and hope as you continue your journey together.

With gratitude,

Mark Robertson, RN

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A Personal Welcome

Hope begins with understanding.

If you're reading this guide, chances are you've begun noticing changes.

Perhaps you're concerned about your own memory.

Perhaps you've noticed changes in your spouse, a parent, a brother, a sister, or a close friend.

Or maybe someone you love has recently received a diagnosis, and you're wondering where to begin.

If so, I want you to know something right away.

You're not alone.

During more than three decades as a registered nurse, I've cared for many individuals living with memory disorders, and I've walked beside countless families trying to understand what was happening to someone they love.

I've also learned that fear often grows from uncertainty.

When we don't understand what's happening, it's easy to imagine the worst.

The good news is that memory changes can have many different causes. Some are related to normal aging.

Some are temporary and treatable. Others require ongoing care and planning.

The important thing isn't to diagnose the problem yourself.

The important thing is to recognize changes, ask questions, and seek the right medical evaluation.

That's exactly why I wrote this guide.

My goal isn't to overwhelm you with medical terminology or frightening statistics.



From Mark's Experience

Families often feel like they have to understand everything at once. They don't. The families who do best usually take one step at a time, ask questions, and work closely with their healthcare team.



Instead, I want to help you understand what memory changes may mean, what steps to take next, and how families can support one another through every stage of the journey.

Most importantly, I want you to know that a diagnosis—whatever it may ultimately be—does not define a person.

The Person You Love Is Still There

Your husband is still your husband.

Your wife is still your wife.

Your brother is still your brother.

Your sister is still your sister.

And every person deserves to be treated with dignity, patience, and love.

I hope these pages provide practical guidance, encouragement, and reassurance.

Take them one page at a time.

There's no need to read everything in one sitting.

Keep this guide nearby.

Write notes in the margins.

Share it with family members.

Come back to it whenever new questions arise.

Most of all...

Don't lose hope.

Knowledge reduces fear.

Understanding builds confidence.

And every journey begins with a single step.



— Mark Robertson, RN
Founder, LifeHealthNow

When Memory Begins to Change

Not every memory problem is dementia.



Memory Changes Are More Common Than Most People Realize

One of the first questions people ask is whether memory loss is simply a normal part of getting older.

The answer is...

Sometimes.

Most of us occasionally forget a name, misplace our keys, or walk into a room only to wonder why we went there. Experiences like these happen at every age, and they often become a little more common as we grow older.

That alone does not mean someone has dementia.

The challenge is knowing when ordinary forgetfulness begins to interfere with everyday life.

Understanding that difference is one of the most important reasons to seek medical evaluation when concerns arise.

Normal Aging Isn't the Same as Dementia

Growing older naturally brings changes throughout the body, including the brain.

Many healthy older adults notice that it takes a little longer to remember a name or learn something new.

They may rely more on calendars, reminder notes, or smartphone alerts than they did years ago.

Despite these changes, they continue to manage their finances, keep appointments, drive safely, enjoy hobbies, and live independently.

That is very different from the progressive changes seen in dementia.

Memory Changes Can Have Many Causes

Many conditions—not just dementia—can affect memory and thinking.

Many medical conditions can affect memory, concentration, and thinking.

Common causes of memory changes include:



Dehydration



Medication side effects



Poor sleep



Depression or anxiety



Vitamin deficiencies



Thyroid disorders



Hearing or vision loss



Urinary tract infections or other illnesses



Uncontrolled diabetes



Stroke



Dementia

Some of these conditions are temporary.

Some are treatable.

Some require ongoing medical care.

The important thing is not to guess.

The important thing is to discover the cause so the right treatment or support can begin.

From Mark's Experience

One of the first things I tell families is not to assume that every memory change is Alzheimer's disease. Over the years, I've cared for many people whose thinking improved once an underlying medical problem was identified and treated.

That's why I encourage families not to guess. Let your healthcare team help you find the cause.



Normal Aging, Mild Cognitive Impairment, or Dementia?

Understanding the differences can help you know when it's time to seek medical advice.

One of the most common questions families ask is whether memory changes are simply part of getting older—or something more.

The answer isn't always obvious. Healthcare providers look for patterns of change over time and, most importantly, whether those changes begin to interfere with daily life.

The comparison below is designed to educate—not to diagnose.

Normal Aging

What you might notice

- ✓ Occasionally forgetting a name but remembering it later.
- ✓ Misplacing keys or glasses from time to time.
- ✓ Walking into a room and forgetting why.
- ✓ Occasionally needing reminders or written notes.
- ✓ Learning new things a little more slowly.

What this usually means

These changes are common as we age and usually do not interfere with everyday independence.

Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)

What you might notice

- ✓ Memory problems become more noticeable.
- ✓ Family members begin to notice changes.
- ✓ Frequently forgetting appointments without reminders.
- ✓ Needing more lists or calendars than before.
- ✓ Still able to live independently.

What this usually means

MCI deserves medical evaluation because some people remain stable for years while others experience further decline.

Dementia

What you might notice

- ✓ Memory loss begins interfering with daily life.
- ✓ Repeating questions frequently.
- ✓ Difficulty managing medications or finances.
- ✓ Becoming confused about familiar places.
- ✓ Increasing dependence on others.

What this usually means

Dementia is not a normal part of aging. Early evaluation and support can help individuals and families plan for the future and improve quality of life.

Remember

No guide can diagnose memory problems.

If you or someone you love is experiencing changes in memory or thinking, schedule an appointment with a qualified healthcare provider for a complete evaluation.

Early answers are almost always better than delayed answers.

When Should You Seek a Medical Evaluation?

Early answers provide the greatest opportunity for treatment, planning, and peace of mind.



You Don't Need to Wait Until Things Become Severe

Many families postpone talking with a healthcare provider because they hope the changes will simply go away.

Others worry that bringing up memory concerns will somehow make the situation worse.

Neither is true.

The earlier memory changes are evaluated, the more opportunities there may be to identify treatable causes, begin appropriate treatment, and make informed decisions for the future.

Remember—many conditions besides dementia can affect memory and thinking.



When Should You Seek a Medical Evaluation?

Early answers provide the greatest opportunity for treatment, planning, and peace of mind.

Consider Scheduling an Evaluation If You Notice:

- ✓ Repeating the same questions several times in a conversation.
- ✓ Frequently forgetting important appointments or events.
- ✓ Difficulty managing medications correctly.
- ✓ Problems paying bills or handling finances.
- ✓ Getting lost in familiar places.
- ✓ Increased confusion about dates, time, or location.
- ✓ Noticeable changes in judgment or decision-making.
- ✓ Family members expressing concern about memory or behavior.
- ✓ Personality or behavioral changes that seem unusual.

One symptom alone does not necessarily mean dementia.

However, persistent changes deserve medical attention.

What Will the Healthcare Provider Do?

A complete evaluation may include:

-  A detailed medical history
-  A review of current medications
-  A brief memory or cognitive assessment
-  Blood tests to look for reversible causes
-  Brain imaging, if appropriate
-  A conversation with family members about observed changes

Every evaluation is tailored to the individual.

From Mark's Experience

One of the most valuable things a family can do is write down specific examples before the appointment. Instead of saying, "Dad's memory seems worse," try describing what you've actually observed.

For example:

"He got lost driving home from church."

"She forgot to take her insulin three times this week."

"He asked the same question four times during dinner."

Specific examples help healthcare providers understand **what has changed and how those changes are affecting everyday life.**

Remember

Seeking an evaluation doesn't mean you're expecting the worst.

It means you're taking the first step toward understanding what's happening and making informed decisions together.

Knowledge is empowering.



Living Well After a Diagnosis

A diagnosis changes many things—but it doesn't change the person you love.

Receiving a diagnosis of Mild Cognitive Impairment or dementia can bring many emotions. Families often describe feeling frightened, overwhelmed, or uncertain about what the future may hold. Those feelings are completely understandable.

But one thing is important to remember from the very beginning:

A diagnosis is the beginning of a new chapter—not the end of the story.

Many people continue to enjoy meaningful lives for years after a diagnosis. They celebrate birthdays, laugh with grandchildren, travel, attend church, enjoy hobbies, and make new memories with the people they love.

The goal is not simply to add years to life.

The goal is to add life to the years.

Focus on What Remains

It's natural to notice the abilities that are changing.

Try not to overlook the abilities that remain.

Your loved one may still enjoy:

- ✓ Listening to favorite music
- ✓ Gardening
- ✓ Walking outdoors
- ✓ Looking through family photographs
- ✓ Helping prepare simple meals
- ✓ Playing cards or board games
- ✓ Attending family gatherings
- ✓ Spending time with grandchildren
- ✓ Sharing stories from earlier years



Instead of focusing on what has been lost, look for opportunities to celebrate what is still possible.

Build a Team

No family should feel they have to navigate this journey alone.

Your healthcare team may include:

-  Your primary care provider
-  A neurologist or memory specialist
-  A pharmacist
-  A dietitian
-  A physical or occupational therapist
-  A speech-language pathologist
-  Support groups
-  Family and friends

Accepting help isn't a sign of weakness.

It's one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself—and the person you love.

From Mark's Experience

One of the most meaningful moments I see is when families stop trying to "fix" every problem and begin focusing on enjoying each day together.

Some of the happiest memories aren't found in big events.

They're found in ordinary moments:

A shared cup of coffee.

A favorite song.

A walk around the neighborhood.

A family meal.

Those moments matter more than you may realize.

Remember

You don't have to walk this journey perfectly.

You simply have to walk it together.

Daily Routine Planner

Consistent routines can reduce anxiety, improve independence, and bring structure to the day.

Morning

Wake-up Time: _____

- ☐ Personal hygiene
- ☐ Get dressed
- ☐ Breakfast
- ☐ Morning medications
- ☐ Drink water
- ☐ Light exercise or stretching
- ☐ Other: _____

Notes: _____

Afternoon

- ☐ Lunch
- ☐ Drink water
- ☐ Social activity or family time
- ☐ Walk or light physical activity
- ☐ Quiet rest if needed
- ☐ Mental activity (reading, puzzles, music, hobbies)
- ☐ Other: _____

Notes: _____



Evening

- ☐ Dinner
- ☐ Evening medications
- ☐ Relaxing activity (music, reading, conversation)
- ☐ Prepare for bedtime
- ☐ Drink water
- ☐ Bedtime at approximately: _____

Notes: _____

Healthy Habits Checklist

Today we...

- ☐ Ate balanced meals
- ☐ Stayed hydrated
- ☐ Spent time moving or exercising
- ☐ Enjoyed meaningful social interaction
- ☐ Stimulated the mind with enjoyable activities
- ☐ Spent time outdoors or in natural light
- ☐ Maintained a consistent bedtime routine



★ Today's Highlights

One thing that went especially well today: _____

Things We Want to Remember for Tomorrow

LifeHealthNow Tip

A predictable daily routine can help reduce confusion and anxiety while supporting independence.

Remember, routines should provide structure—not rigidity. It's okay to adjust the schedule when life happens or when your loved one's needs change.



Communicating with Someone Living with Dementia

The words you choose can make the difference between frustration and connection.



Communication Is About More Than Words

As dementia progresses, the brain gradually loses its ability to process, organize, and recall information. This can make conversations confusing and frustrating—not only for the person living with dementia, but also for the people who love them.

It's important to remember that your loved one is not trying to be difficult.

They are trying to make sense of a world that **no longer always makes sense to them.**

Approaching every conversation with patience and empathy can reduce frustration for everyone involved.

Try to Enter Their World

One of the biggest changes families can make is learning to stop expecting the person living with dementia to enter our reality.

Instead, whenever possible, we gently enter theirs.

That doesn't mean encouraging false beliefs.

It means recognizing that arguing, correcting, or repeatedly insisting on the facts usually increases anxiety rather than reducing it.

Our goal isn't to win an argument.

Our goal is to preserve trust.

Instead of This... Try This...

Instead of saying...	Try saying...
"I already told you."	"Let's go over it again together."
"Don't you remember?"	"That's okay. Let me help."
"You're wrong."	"Tell me more about what you're thinking."
"No, that's not what happened."	"I can understand why it feels that way."
"You can't do that anymore."	"Let's do it together."
"Calm down."	"I'm here with you."
"Because I said so."	"Let's figure this out together."

Small changes in the words we choose can completely change a conversation.



Five Simple Rules for Better Communication

1. Speak Slowly

Use short, simple sentences.

Pause between ideas.

Give your loved one time to process what you've said.

Silence isn't a problem.

Sometimes the brain simply needs a little more time.

2. Ask One Question at a Time

Instead of:

"Did you eat breakfast, take your medicine, and feed the dog?"

Try:

"Have you had breakfast?"

Wait.

Then ask the next question.

3. Avoid Arguing

Trying to convince someone with dementia that they're wrong rarely works.

It usually creates fear, frustration, or embarrassment.

When possible, redirect the conversation rather than correcting every mistake.



Five Simple Rules for Better Communication (cont)

4. Watch Your Body Language

Your tone of voice, facial expression, and posture often communicate more than your words.

Smile.

Sit at eye level.

Maintain gentle eye contact.

Approach from the front rather than from behind.

Sometimes holding a hand communicates more than an entire conversation.

5. Validate Feelings

Even when facts are incorrect, emotions are real.

Instead of correcting the facts immediately, respond to the emotion first.

For example:

"I want to go home."

Instead of:

"You are home."

Try:

"Home is a place where you always felt safe. Tell me what you miss most."

Often, the conversation changes completely.

From Mark's Experience

One of the hardest lessons for families is realizing that success isn't measured by whether you "win" the conversation.

Success is measured by whether your loved one feels safe, respected, and understood.

There are days when being kind is more important than being right.

Those are often the days your loved one will remember—not because they remember the conversation, but because they remember how you made them feel.



Remember

Your loved one may forget your words.

They may even forget your name.

But they often continue to remember how you made them feel.

Choose kindness whenever possible.

It is one of the most powerful forms of communication we have.



Understanding Challenging Behaviors

Behavior is often a form of communication.



Every Behavior Has a Reason

One of the most difficult parts of dementia is learning that behaviors often become a person's primary way of communicating.

When memory and language become impaired, it becomes much harder to explain pain, fear, hunger, frustration, or confusion with words.

Instead, those needs may be expressed through actions.

The behavior itself is usually not the problem.

More often, it is a signal that something else needs attention.

Before reacting to a behavior, pause and ask yourself:

"What might my loved one be trying to tell me?"

That simple question can completely change your approach.

Ask These Five Questions First

Before assuming the behavior is "just dementia," consider whether your loved one might be experiencing one of these common problems:

-  Could they be in pain?
-  Are they hungry or thirsty?
-  Do they need to use the restroom?
-  Are they tired, overwhelmed, or frightened?
-  Could an illness or medication change be affecting them?

Many behaviors improve dramatically once the underlying cause is identified.

Common Behaviors and What They May Mean

Behavior	Possible Meaning
Repeating the same question	Anxiety or inability to remember the answer
Restlessness or pacing	Pain, boredom, excess energy, or discomfort
Anger or agitation	Fear, frustration, confusion, or overstimulation
Wandering	Looking for something familiar, exercise, or purpose
Refusing care	Embarrassment, discomfort, or not understanding what is happening
Calling for family members	Seeking comfort, security, or reassurance
Increased confusion late in the day	Fatigue or "sundowning"

Remember that the same behavior may have different causes on different days.

Respond, Don't React

When challenging behaviors occur:

- ✓ Speak calmly and slowly.
- ✓ Avoid arguing or correcting.
- ✓ Reduce noise and distractions.
- ✓ Offer reassurance before giving instructions.
- ✓ Redirect attention to another activity if needed.
- ✓ Keep routines as consistent as possible.
- ✓ Look for patterns that might help identify triggers.

A calm caregiver often helps create a calmer environment.

From Mark's Experience

One of the biggest mistakes I see is focusing only on stopping the behavior.

Instead, I encourage families to become investigators.

When someone suddenly becomes agitated, ask yourself:

"What changed?"

Did they miss lunch?

Are they uncomfortable?

Is the room too noisy?

Did too many people begin talking at once?

I've seen countless situations improve—not because we stopped the behavior—but because we discovered what was causing it.

Remember

Every behavior tells a story.

When words become difficult, actions often become the person's way of asking for help.

Understanding the message behind the behavior is one of the greatest gifts you can give someone living with dementia.

What works today may not work tomorrow—and that's okay. Flexibility is one of the most valuable skills a caregiver can develop.

Instructions

You don't need to record every day—only days when you notice something new, unusual, or concerning.

[illegible]

Things to Watch For

You may wish to record changes such as:

- ☐ Increased confusion
- ☐ Repeating questions more often
- ☐ Restlessness or pacing
- ☐ Agitation or anger
- ☐ Wandering
- ☐ Falls or near falls
- ☐ Changes in sleep
- ☐ Changes in appetite
- ☐ Hallucinations or unusual behaviors
- ☐ Medication changes
- ☐ Illness, pain, or fever
- ☐ Other: _____

Notes

LifeHealthNow Tip

Many behaviors have an underlying cause. Look for patterns related to the time of day, hunger, fatigue, pain, medication changes, illness, unfamiliar environments, or overstimulation. These observations can be extremely helpful during healthcare appointments.



Creating a Safe Home Environment

Small changes at home can make a big difference in safety, independence, and peace of mind.



Safety Doesn't Mean Taking Away Independence

One of the greatest fears after a diagnosis is losing independence.

Families often feel they need to change everything overnight.

In most cases, that's neither necessary nor helpful.

Instead, think of home safety as making small adjustments that allow your loved one to remain as independent and confident as possible for as long as possible.

The goal is not to restrict life.

The goal is to make life safer.



Start With the Basics

Many accidents can be prevented by making a few simple changes around the home.

Consider these safety improvements:

✓ Remove loose throw rugs.	✓ Keep walkways free of clutter.
✓ Improve lighting, especially in hallways and bathrooms.	✓ Install grab bars where needed.
✓ Secure loose electrical cords.	✓ Label rooms or drawers if helpful.
✓ Keep frequently used items within easy reach.	✓ Ensure smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are working.

Small changes often make the biggest difference.

Medication Safety

Medications become increasingly difficult to manage as memory changes progress.

To reduce the risk of medication errors:

-  Use a weekly pill organizer.
-  Establish a consistent medication routine.
-  Set reminders or alarms when appropriate.
-  Have a trusted family member periodically review medications.
-  Keep an updated medication list available for healthcare appointments.

Never stop or change medications without discussing them with your healthcare provider.



Reduce Fall Risk

Falls are one of the leading causes of injury among older adults.
Simple steps can reduce that risk:

-  Encourage supportive, well-fitting shoes.
-  Keep pathways well lit.
-  Choose sturdy furniture that is easy to get in and out of.
-  Use walkers or canes if recommended.
-  Place non-slip mats in tubs and showers.

Remember that illness, dehydration, medication changes, or infections can temporarily increase fall risk.

From Mark's Experience

One of the best safety assessments I've ever performed didn't begin with a checklist.
It began with a walk.

Walk through the home exactly as your loved one does each day.

Notice where they pause.

Notice where they hesitate.

Notice what they reach for to steady themselves.

Sometimes the greatest hazards aren't obvious until you see the home through their eyes.

Remember

The safest home is not always the one with the most equipment.

It's the one that supports independence while reducing unnecessary risks.

Every small improvement helps create confidence—for both the person living with dementia and the family who loves them.



HOME SAFETY CHECKLIST

LifeHealthNow Home Safety Assessment

A room-by-room guide to creating a safer home for someone living with memory changes.

Living Room

- ☐ Walkways are free of clutter.
- ☐ Throw rugs have been removed or secured.
- ☐ Electrical cords are out of walking paths.
- ☐ Furniture is sturdy and easy to get in and out of.
- ☐ Frequently used items are within easy reach.
- ☐ Adequate lighting is available during the day and night.
- ☐ Emergency phone numbers are easily accessible.
- ☐ Smoke detector is working properly.

Kitchen

- ☐ Frequently used dishes and utensils are easy to reach.
- ☐ Cleaning chemicals are stored safely.
- ☐ Sharp knives are stored securely.
- ☐ Expired food has been removed.
- ☐ Stove safety plan is in place.
- ☐ Fire extinguisher is available.
- ☐ Refrigerator contains healthy, easy-to-prepare foods.

Bathroom

- ☐ Grab bars are securely installed.
- ☐ Non-slip mats are in place.
- ☐ Toilet is easy to access.
- ☐ Adequate lighting is available.
- ☐ Frequently used toiletries are within reach.
- ☐ Water temperature is set to prevent burns.

Bedroom

- ☐ Clear pathway from bed to bathroom.
- ☐ Nightlight is available.
- ☐ Telephone or emergency call device is nearby.
- ☐ Bed height is safe and comfortable.
- ☐ Shoes and clothing are easy to access.
- ☐ Frequently used items are within reach.

Hallways & Stairs

- ☐ Handrails are secure.
- ☐ Stairs are well lit.
- ☐ Steps are free of clutter.
- ☐ Extension cords are not used across walking areas.
- ☐ Flooring is even and secure.

Medication Safety

- ☐ Current medication list is available.
- ☐ Weekly pill organizer is being used.
- ☐ Medication schedule is clearly established.
- ☐ Medications are reviewed regularly with healthcare provider.
- ☐ Expired medications have been removed.



General Safety

- ☐ Eyeglasses are current and easily available.
- ☐ Hearing aids are working properly.
- ☐ Shoes fit well and provide good support.
- ☐ Walking aids are available and used correctly.
- ☐ Emergency contact information is current.
- ☐ Family members know emergency plans.
- ☐ Carbon monoxide detector is working.
- ☐ Smoke detectors have been tested recently.

My Highest Priority Improvements

After completing this checklist, identify the three most important changes to make first.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Date Completed: _____

Completed by: _____

From Mark's Experience

Don't try to change everything in one weekend.

Start with the improvements that will have the greatest impact on safety. Small changes made consistently often make the biggest difference. The goal isn't to create a perfect home—it's to create one that supports independence while reducing unnecessary risks.

LifeHealthNow Tip: Complete this checklist every 6–12 months or whenever there is a significant change in memory, mobility, or health status.

Taking Care of the Caregiver

You cannot pour from an empty cup.



Caring for Yourself Is Not Selfish

Many caregivers devote every ounce of their energy to the person they love.

They skip meals.

They lose sleep.

They cancel appointments.

They stop seeing friends.

They tell themselves they'll rest "later."

But later often never comes.

The truth is simple:

The quality of your caregiving depends on the quality of your own health—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Taking care of yourself is not abandoning your loved one.

It is one of the most important ways you can continue caring for them well.

Watch for Caregiver Burnout

Caregiver stress often develops gradually.

Common warning signs include:

- ✓ Feeling exhausted most days.
- ✓ Becoming impatient or easily frustrated.
- ✓ Difficulty sleeping.
- ✓ Feeling isolated or alone.
- ✓ Losing interest in activities you once enjoyed.
- ✓ Changes in appetite or weight.
- ✓ Feeling guilty whenever you take time for yourself.

Recognizing these signs early allows you to seek support before becoming overwhelmed.



Today, Give Yourself Permission To...

- ❤️ Ask for help.
- 😴 Get enough sleep.
- 🥗 Eat nourishing meals.
- 🚶 Take short walks.
- ☕ Enjoy a quiet cup of coffee.
- 📖 Read a book.
- 🙏 Pray or meditate.
- 😂 Laugh.
- 👨👩 Spend time with friends and family.

Your well-being matters.

Accept Help When It's Offered

Many friends sincerely want to help.

Instead of saying,

"We're fine."

Try saying,

"Would you mind sitting with Mom for an hour while I run errands?"

or

"Could you pick up groceries this week?"

People often want to help.

They simply don't know what you need.

From Mark's Experience

Over the years, I've watched incredible spouses and adult children pour everything they had into caring for someone they loved.

Some became so focused on caregiving that they neglected their own health.

Remember this:

Your loved one needs you, not a perfect caregiver.

Taking a break, asking for help, or accepting respite care isn't giving up.

It's making sure you'll have the strength to continue this journey tomorrow.

Remember

You deserve the same compassion you give so freely to others.
Caring for yourself is not a distraction from caregiving.
It is an essential part of caregiving.

To the husband or wife walking this journey...

No one else will fully understand what this journey feels like.
There will be difficult days.
There will also be beautiful moments.
Don't let guilt keep you from accepting help.
You are carrying a tremendous responsibility, and you deserve kindness—including from yourself.



My Caregiver Wellness Plan

Three people I can call for help:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Three activities that help me recharge:

☐ Walking

☐ Reading

☐ Prayer

☐ Gardening

☐ Music

☐ Time with friends

Other: _____

One thing I will do for myself this week:

My next medical appointment:

If I begin feeling overwhelmed, I will contact:



Knowing When It's Time for More Help

Accepting help isn't giving up—it allows you to continue providing the best possible care.



Most Families Reach This Point

One of the most difficult decisions families face is recognizing when additional help may be needed.

Many caregivers promise themselves:

"I'll do this on my own."

There is love in that promise.

But there is also wisdom in recognizing that no one is meant to carry this journey alone.

Accepting help isn't a sign that you've failed.

It's often one of the most loving decisions you can make.

Signs It May Be Time to Ask for More Help

Consider seeking additional support if you notice:

- ✓ Frequent falls or increasing mobility problems.
- ✓ Medications being missed or taken incorrectly.
- ✓ Wandering or becoming lost.
- ✓ Increased confusion that makes staying home unsafe.
- ✓ Difficulty with bathing, dressing, or eating.
- ✓ Caregiver exhaustion or declining health.
- ✓ Safety concerns that continue despite changes at home.

Needing help doesn't mean you've done anything wrong.

It simply means the needs have changed.

There Are Many Types of Help

You don't have to make every decision at once.

Support exists at many levels, and families often benefit from adding services gradually.

Home Health Services

A healthcare professional may visit the home to provide skilled nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, or other medically necessary services when ordered by a healthcare provider.

Adult Day Programs

These programs provide social interaction, structured activities, and supervision during the day while giving caregivers an opportunity to work, rest, or attend to other responsibilities.

Respite Care

Every caregiver needs an occasional break.

Respite care provides short-term assistance so caregivers can rest, attend appointments, travel, or simply recharge.

Taking advantage of respite services is an investment in your ability to continue caregiving.



Memory Care Communities

Some families eventually decide that a specialized memory care community provides the safest and most supportive environment.

This decision is never easy.

For many families, however, it allows both the individual and the caregiver to enjoy greater safety, structure, and peace of mind.

From Mark's Experience

One of the hardest conversations I've had with families begins with these words:

"I promised I'd never put Mom in a facility."

I understand that promise.

It comes from love.

But I encourage families to ask a different question:

" **Where can Mom receive the safest, most compassionate care at this stage of her journey?"**

Sometimes the answer is home.

Sometimes it isn't.

Making a different decision than you once imagined isn't breaking a promise.

It's responding to changing needs with love and wisdom.

The measure of a caregiver isn't where care is provided. It's whether the person is loved, respected, safe, and treated with dignity.

Remember

The goal is never to do everything yourself.

The goal is to make sure your loved one receives the care, dignity, and support they deserve—while making sure you remain healthy enough to continue walking beside them.

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness.

It is often one of the strongest decisions a family can make.

Planning Ahead Checklist

- ☐ Family meeting held.
- ☐ Emergency contacts updated.
- ☐ Healthcare wishes discussed.
- ☐ Local resources identified.
- ☐ Home safety reassessed.
- ☐ Caregiver support plan reviewed.
- ☐ Questions prepared for the next healthcare appointment.



Planning for the Future

Planning ahead is one of the greatest gifts you can give the people you love.



Have the Conversation Early

One of the kindest things a family can do is talk about future wishes before decisions become urgent. These conversations aren't always easy.

Many people avoid them because they feel uncomfortable.

But planning ahead often brings peace of mind—not only to the individual, but also to everyone who may someday be asked to make important decisions.

Having these conversations early allows your loved one's wishes to guide future care.



Important Topics to Discuss

Every family's situation is different, but these are some of the most important conversations to have.

Healthcare Wishes

What types of medical care would your loved one want if they were unable to speak for themselves? Discuss these wishes openly and document them according to your state's requirements.

Choosing a Healthcare Decision-Maker

If your loved one could no longer make medical decisions, who would they trust to speak on their behalf? Choose someone who understands their values and is willing to honor their wishes.

Financial Planning

As memory changes progress, managing finances can become more difficult.

Consider discussing:

- Paying monthly bills
- Banking and online accounts
- Insurance information
- Long-term financial planning
- Protection against scams and financial exploitation

Planning early often prevents confusion later.

Important Documents

Make sure important documents are easy to locate.

These may include:

- ✓ Identification
- ✓ Insurance cards
- ✓ Medication list
- ✓ Advance directives
- ✓ Powers of attorney
- ✓ Birth and marriage certificates
- ✓ Military records (if applicable)
- ✓ Property or financial records

Keep these documents together in a secure location, and make sure trusted family members know where they are.



From Mark's Experience

One of the greatest gifts I've seen families give each other isn't a financial gift.

It's clarity.

When a family has already talked openly about healthcare wishes, finances, and future decisions, they spend less time wondering,

"What would Mom have wanted?"

—and more time simply being together.

Those conversations aren't always easy.

But they are acts of love.

Remember

Planning for the future doesn't mean expecting the worst.

It means making thoughtful decisions while everyone still has the opportunity to participate.

The conversations you have today may become one of the greatest gifts you leave your family tomorrow.



LifeHealthNow Tip

Review the following worksheet at least once a year or whenever there is a significant change in health, living arrangements, or family circumstances.



Family Planning Worksheet

Our Family Planning Checklist

Important Conversations

- ☐ We have discussed healthcare wishes.
- ☐ We know who will make healthcare decisions if needed.
- ☐ We have talked about financial planning.
- ☐ We know where important documents are stored.
- ☐ Emergency contact information is current.
- ☐ Family members know who to call in an emergency.

Important Documents Are Located Here:

Primary Healthcare Provider: _____

Phone: _____

Preferred Hospital: _____

Emergency Contacts

1. _____

Phone _____

2. _____

Phone _____

3. _____

Phone _____

Questions We Still Need to Discuss

Date Reviewed: _____

Helpful Resources for the Journey

You don't have to find every answer on your own.



There Is Help Available

One of the biggest mistakes families make is believing they have to figure everything out by themselves. You don't.

Across the country, there are organizations, healthcare professionals, and community resources dedicated to helping individuals living with memory disorders and the families who care for them. Sometimes the hardest part is simply knowing where to begin.

The following resources are excellent places to start.



Your Healthcare Team

Each member of your healthcare team plays an important role.

Primary Care Provider

Coordinates overall healthcare and often serves as the first point of contact when memory concerns arise.

Neurologist or Memory Specialist

Helps evaluate memory disorders, establish a diagnosis, and recommend treatment options.

Pharmacist

Reviews medications for possible side effects, interactions, and opportunities to simplify medication routines.

Registered Dietitian

Provides guidance on nutrition, hydration, and maintaining healthy eating habits that support overall health.

Physical and Occupational Therapists

Help improve strength, balance, mobility, and safety while promoting independence.

Speech-Language Pathologist

Assists with communication, swallowing concerns, and cognitive strategies for daily living.

Social Worker or Care Coordinator

Connects families with community resources, financial assistance programs, respite services, and long-term planning support.

Health Coach

Can help individuals and families implement healthy lifestyle strategies that support brain and overall health. Through personalized guidance on nutrition, sleep, physical activity, stress management, and other daily habits, a health coach can complement your medical care and help you build healthier routines for the future.



Organizations That Can Help

Families often find tremendous encouragement through organizations dedicated to memory care and caregiving.

Consider connecting with:

- Alzheimer's Association
- Area Agency on Aging
- Family Caregiver Alliance
- National Institute on Aging
- Local caregiver support groups
- Community senior centers

Your healthcare provider can often recommend trusted local resources available in your community



From Mark's Experience

One of the greatest sources of comfort I've seen isn't finding all the answers.

It's discovering that other families are walking the same road.

Support groups aren't simply places to exchange information.

They're places where people understand.

Sometimes hearing someone say,

"We've been there too."

can make all the difference.

Remember

Asking for help doesn't mean you've reached the end of the road.

Often, it's the beginning of walking the journey with people who understand it.



LifeHealthNow Tip

No family is expected to remember everything. Bring this guide with you to healthcare appointments and write down answers as they come. Over time, these notes become part of your family's journey.

My Family Resource Page

Important Phone Numbers:

Primary Care Provider

Neurologist

Pharmacy

Home Health Agency

Emergency Contact

Local Resources

Support Group

Adult Day Program

Respite Care

Memory Care Community

Faith Community

Other Helpful Resources

Websites I Want to Remember

Questions for My Next Appointment



Frequently Asked Questions

Answers to some of the questions families ask most often.

Can memory loss be a normal part of aging?

Some mild changes in memory are common as we grow older. Occasionally forgetting a name or misplacing your keys does not necessarily mean someone has dementia. The important question is whether memory changes are beginning to interfere with everyday life.

Is every memory problem Alzheimer's disease?

No. Memory changes can have many causes, including medication side effects, dehydration, infections, poor sleep, depression, vitamin deficiencies, thyroid disorders, and other medical conditions. A thorough medical evaluation is the best place to begin.

Can dementia be cured?

At this time, most forms of dementia cannot be cured. However, treatments, healthy lifestyle changes, and supportive care may help manage symptoms, maintain independence longer, and improve quality of life. Some causes of memory problems are reversible when identified and treated early.

Should I correct my loved one when they're wrong?

Usually not.

If the misunderstanding isn't creating a safety concern, correcting the person often increases frustration and anxiety. Instead, acknowledge the emotion behind what they're saying and gently redirect the conversation when appropriate.

Remember:

Your goal is connection—not winning an argument.

Should someone with dementia continue driving?

Driving decisions should always be discussed with a healthcare provider. Changes in judgment, reaction time, or spatial awareness can make driving unsafe even when the person feels confident behind the wheel. Families should address this topic early, before a crisis occurs.



How do I explain dementia to grandchildren?

Use simple, age-appropriate language.

For example:

"Grandma's brain is having trouble remembering things. She may forget names or ask the same question more than once, but she still loves you very much."

Children often respond better to honesty than to uncertainty.

Will my loved one always recognize me?

Memory changes affect everyone differently.

Some people continue recognizing family members throughout their illness. Others gradually lose the ability to remember names or relationships.

Even when memories fade, many people continue to recognize familiar voices, comforting routines, music, touch, and acts of kindness.

Love is often remembered in ways that words cannot explain.

Is it okay to ask for help?

Absolutely.

No one is expected to care for a loved one alone.

Accepting help allows you to continue providing the best care possible while protecting your own health and well-being.

Can healthy lifestyle changes still make a difference after a diagnosis of Dementia?

Yes. While lifestyle changes are not a cure for dementia, healthy habits can support overall brain and body health at every stage. Nutritious eating, regular physical activity, restorative sleep, stress management, social engagement, and managing chronic medical conditions all contribute to quality of life. Every positive change is an investment in overall health, and it's never too late to begin.

Discuss any significant lifestyle changes or supplements with your healthcare provider to ensure they are appropriate for your individual situation.



What if I don't know what to do next?

That's okay.

Almost every family feels overwhelmed at first.

Take one step at a time.

Talk with your healthcare provider.

Ask questions.

Use trusted resources.

Accept help when it's offered.

You do not have to have every answer today.

From Mark's Experience

One question I've heard countless times over the years is:

"Am I doing enough?"

My answer is almost always the same.

If you're reading a guide like this, asking questions, seeking help, and showing up day after day for someone you love...

You're already doing far more than you realize.

Perfection isn't the goal.

Presence is.

Remember

The most important thing you can give someone living with dementia isn't a perfect memory. It's a life filled with dignity, compassion, patience, and love.



Before You Close This Guide

One final thought from Mark Robertson, RN

When I began my nursing career more than thirty years ago, I thought my job was to help fight diseases.

Over time, I realized my true calling was caring for people.

I've cared for individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

I've walked beside frightened spouses.

I've comforted sons and daughters who wondered if they were making the right decisions.

I've celebrated small victories that most people would never notice.

And I've held the hands of families during some of the hardest moments of their lives.

If there's one thing those years have taught me, it's this:

A diagnosis changes many things.

It does not change the value of a person's life.

The person you love is still the person you have always loved.

Their memories may change.

Their words may become harder to find.

They may need more help than they once did.

But they still need laughter.

They still need kindness.

They still need companionship.

They still need to know they are loved.

There will be difficult days.

Some days will leave you exhausted.

Some decisions will feel impossible.

And there will be moments when you wonder whether you're doing enough.

On those days, I hope you'll remember something.

You don't have to be a perfect caregiver.

You only have to be a loving one.



Love is found in ordinary moments.

A shared cup of coffee.

A favorite hymn.

Holding a hand.

Looking through old photographs.

Sitting quietly together on the porch over a cup of coffee.

Those moments matter more than you may ever realize.

If this guide has encouraged you, answered a question, or simply reminded you that you're not walking this journey alone, then it has accomplished exactly what I hoped it would.

Thank you for allowing me to walk beside your family for these few pages.

I sincerely wish you peace, strength, and many meaningful moments together in the days ahead.

Take one day at a time.

Choose kindness whenever you can.

Accept help when you need it.

Celebrate every good moment.

And never lose hope.

Because hope doesn't come from pretending the journey is easy.

Hope comes from knowing that love remains.

Always.

—

Mark Robertson, RN

Founder, LifeHealthNow





**"The person you love may forget many things...
But they will never stop needing your love."**

LifeHealthNow

Helping Families Build Healthier Lives.



About the Author

Mark Robertson, RN

Mark Robertson is a Registered Nurse with more than three decades of experience caring for older adults and their families. Throughout his career, he has worked in long-term care, rehabilitation, dementia care, and nursing leadership, helping families navigate some of life's most difficult healthcare decisions with compassion, practical guidance, and respect.

In addition to his nursing career, Mark has a deep interest in functional and integrative approaches to health, with a particular focus on brain health, dementia prevention, and healthy aging. His passion is helping individuals and families understand the many factors that influence cognitive health while providing practical strategies to improve quality of life.

Mark is the founder of LifeHealthNow, an educational organization dedicated to empowering people through evidence-informed health education, professional training, and practical wellness resources.

He is also the author of the novel Heartstone and continues to write educational materials designed to make complex healthcare topics understandable for everyday families.



About LifeHealthNow

Our Mission

At LifeHealthNow, we believe that good health begins with knowledge.

Our mission is to provide practical, evidence-informed education that empowers individuals, families, caregivers, and healthcare professionals to make confident decisions about health and wellness.

We are especially passionate about helping families understand brain health, healthy aging, dementia care, and lifestyle approaches that support lifelong wellness.

Every resource we create is built on three guiding principles:

Educate

Provide clear, understandable information.

Empower

Help people feel confident making informed decisions.

Encourage

Offer hope, compassion, and practical support throughout life's health journeys.

Whether you are caring for someone you love or working to improve your own health, our goal is simple:

Helping Families Build Healthier Lives.

Learn More

LifeHealthNow.org



One Final Reminder

You don't have to know all the answers today.

You don't have to walk this journey perfectly.

You simply have to keep showing up with patience, compassion, and love.

There will be difficult days.

There will also be moments of laughter...

Unexpected joy...

Quiet conversations...

And memories you'll treasure forever.

Take one day at a time.

Accept help when you need it.

Celebrate every good moment.

And never forget...

The person you love is still there.

LifeHealthNow

Helping Families Build Healthier Lives.



References

The information in this guide reflects current evidence and accepted clinical practice at the time of publication. Because medical knowledge continues to evolve, readers are encouraged to consult their healthcare professionals and the referenced organizations for the most current recommendations.

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