

COVID-19: PROVIDING CARE TO COMMUNITY DWELLING PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA



The information below should be read in conjunction with official guidance on www.hpsc.ie/ / www.hselibrary.ie

This information is to support staff working in community services on issues that **have or may arise** in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak for people living with dementia and their family carers at home. For official HSE guidance on cocooning see [here](#).

Restrictions associated with the COVID-19 crisis will potentially disproportionately affect people living with dementia:

- Those living alone but managing may experience deterioration and an increase in their symptoms.
- Those living with a relative might not understand the reason for the restrictions resulting in the emergence or an increase in responsive type behaviours.

Address feelings of isolation and maximise engagement as social networks and support structures are reduced.

Sign-post to support services/organisations.

- **Alzheimer Society of Ireland** – helpline open six days a week on 1800 341 341. Their Dementia Adviser Service is running and they have online supports including supports for family carers. See [here](#).
- **Alone** – national support line for older people supporting people’s access to social contact and essentials, call 081 222 024.
- **Local Authority Community Response Forums** – supporting vulnerable people in the community, offering a range of services. See [here](#).
- **An Post** workforce will call into older and vulnerable customer, see [here](#).

[Click here for the Dementia COVID Resource Hub](#) for on-line information/resources for people with dementia and dementia family carers.

Diet

Eating healthy can boost the immune system. The Irish Nutrition and Dietetics institute has helpful info for people with dementia and family carers. See [here](#).

Exercise

Exercise (walking around rooms, exercising in a chair or spending time in the garden is important.

Stay connected

With friends, family via phone, facebook, whatsapp etc.

Activities:

Staying mentally active helps maintain memory and promotes wellbeing. See the Memory Technology Resource Room Activities At Home Booklet for useful suggestions and tips. See [here](#).

Support people to follow infection control guidance as they may not remember:

1. Model hand washing and demonstrate techniques;
2. Build washing into a pattern and routine;
3. Place a step-by-step visual guide in the bathroom and elsewhere as a reminder – see example [here](#);
4. Ensure a plentiful supply of tissues;
5. Have a supply of alcohol based hand sanitizer around the house, particularly if hand washing is proving difficult.

Discuss COVID-19 with the person living with dementia and the restrictions it has imposed; use simple language, illustrations and images.

Special considerations for the person living with others

1. Many family members have to adapt to changing routines; with formal services such as day care suspended, they can be under additional strain.
2. Sign-post family members to services that can offer support including Family Carers Ireland.
3. Discuss COVID-19 with the person living with dementia; explain symptoms and establish what the person's wishes are in the event they become unwell.
4. Discuss alternative caring arrangements if the family carer has to self-isolate or move for treatment. Family Carers Ireland has an Emergency Care Plan template available [here](#).
5. If no other family member is available to provide care discuss other possible options.

Special considerations for the person living alone

- For those cocooning alone check who is dropping off food, fuel and medicines.
- If others are unavailable give them the Local Authority Forum number or with their consent share their number with the Local Forum.
- If the person isn't cooking, check who is dropping meals. This might need to be organized.
- Advise the person to have a list of important telephone numbers by the phone and include their Eircode in case of an emergency.

CASE EXAMPLES

I'm at home as I'm not working so I cancelled the carer, now I'm finding it difficult to persuade my mother to wash or shower.

Try to follow the routine as established by the formal carer i.e. getting up at the same time, have a shower on the same day and perhaps a body wash on other days. Prepare the bathroom in advance; ensure it's warm and comfortable. Lay out the clothes and toiletries. Let the person do as much as they can – this might mean breaking the process into steps. If refusing, don't persist, your anxiety will be picked up by your mother making her more anxious and defensive. Take a break and try again later. Some days you may have to compromise – if she doesn't have a shower or a wash it's not the end of the world – a change of clothes may suffice (take away clothes at night and replace). Using wet wipes can be a quick alternative when washing is posing a problem. Talking to somebody during these difficult times can help. Contact organisations providing support at this time e.g. Alzheimer's Society or Family Carers Ireland.

I can't visit the day centre or my dementia social group. While I have my husband for company I feel very unsettled.

Routine is good. Even though normal routine has changed, set-up a new one and talk to your husband about this. For example, get up at the same time each morning. Break up the day into structured parts e.g. washing, dressing, preparing breakfast, doing chores together, taking time for some exercise (e.g. chair exercise, gardening), lunch and having a set time for participation in enjoyable activities e.g. reading or audiobooks, jigsaws etc. Keep in touch with family and friends by phone, Skype or WhatsApp. Making contact with organisations providing support that may also help e.g. Alzheimer Society. Have a bedtime ritual such as bedtime cues e.g. after the 9.00 news, get the room ready, set out pyjamas. If the above measures do not work and you become more unsettled or you, or your husband, notice you are becoming more anxious, consult your GP for advice.