



Dementia Toolkit – Stay safe and well

Everyday independence



Dementia Toolkit
Living your life with hope



Stay safe and well

Everyday independence

Using the telephone, making a cup of tea, going shopping: there are lots of everyday activities which are important for our wellbeing and help us feel we are in control. Being able to keep doing these everyday activities is what allows you to stay independent. In health research, this is called your 'functional ability'.

Being independent means being free from outside control or support. You can be independent by using approaches or equipment that enable you to do what you can.

In this booklet we:

- explore what our research tells us about the importance of everyday activities for people living with dementia
- provide some strategies for staying independent



I want to try to remain as independent as I can for as long as I can in my own home.

A person with dementia speaking to our researchers



Why are everyday activities important?

We have created an animation which explores why everyday activities are important for people living with dementia and how family and friends can support the person to manage these activities as they become difficult.

You can view this animation in full on our website. Here are some of the key points:

Our research shows that:

- Everyday activities such as going shopping, cleaning, and getting dressed can become harder when living with dementia
- As people with dementia find everyday tasks more difficult their sense of well-being decreases
- As people with dementia find these activities harder, carers experience more stress

When we see someone we care about struggling with a task we naturally want to step in and help. Ironically this can be the opposite of being helpful.

You can still help by:

- Helping a person with dementia to keep practising their skills
- Before you jump in to lend a hand, think: can you encourage, remind, or assist the person with dementia without doing the task for them

You will find more top tips for carers on page 6 of this booklet.

Real-life stories of maintaining everyday independence

We spoke with people living with dementia about the importance of maintaining everyday independence. The quotes below are extracts from this conversation, which you can watch in full on our website.



Keith, a person with dementia, says

"There's also this notion of use it or lose it. Because, if you don't carry on doing things . . . there's the risk of losing the skills because you're not practising them, reinforcing them and, hopefully, maybe even improving them."



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I remember right at the very beginning, my daughters suddenly started putting on my coat. For the kindest, kindest of reasons. And I found that when I was on my own I was starting to struggle to put on my own coat and I said to them, “If you continue to put on my coat I’m going to have to message you every time I want to leave the house for you to come to my house and put on my coat” and they stopped immediately because that wouldn’t have worked.

Wendy, a person with dementia, says

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Top tips for people with dementia to maintain everyday independence

- Discuss and agree how much support is OK for each of the activities that are important to you.
- Focus on being more independent in activities that make you feel you are still 'you': that provide you with your sense of identity and control.
- Have a few acceptable ways of explaining how important it is to you to do an activity yourself. For instance, try saying, "only step in if you see me getting frustrated".
- Be ready to accept help when you need it or to save your energy for the activities that are most important to you.
- Pace your activities so that you are not demanding too much of yourself.
- See if you can simplify an activity rather than needing someone to support you to do it. For instance, buy a cake mix rather than have someone take over baking a cake that needs measuring of raw ingredients.
- Use lists and pictures to help you to follow through the steps of an activity if it will help you.

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"It's just getting used to things. I always say to people: if you're hesitant, then go out with someone, but use the map in your head and you lead the way, so that you're the one getting the confidence."

In her video about walking, Wendy advises

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Top tips for carers to enable people with dementia to maintain everyday independence

It's difficult for everyone when everyday activities are hard to do. As a carer, you might be tempted to take over and do things for the person you support. Often, though, it's better for the person with dementia to stay as independent as possible. You can encourage this by being ready to step in and help when things get difficult, rather than taking over. For example, you could:

- offer assistance in dialling a telephone number if needed, but then step back so that the person with dementia can make the call
- remind the person with dementia to take their medication (if needed) and/or check that the medication has been taken
- accompany a person with dementia to the shops but only help when needed; for example, be ready to help with counting out exact change.

This resource is on the internet. Use the camera on your phone or tablet to scan the QR code below to visit the webpage.



Contact us

We would love to know what you think of the toolkit. We want to improve it based on your feedback.

Please get in touch with us by emailing
IDEAL@exeter.ac.uk

If you prefer to write to us, then please address your letter to:

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