

Nunavummi Disabilities Makinnasuaqtiit Society

GUIDE FOR CAREGIVERS



ᐅᐅᐅᐅ ᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅ ᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅᐅ
Nunavummi Disabilities Makinnasuaqtiit Society
Nunavummi Pimmaqluktut Makinnasuaqtiit Katimayit
Soci t  Nunavummi Disabilities Makinnasuaqtiit

Caring for a family member with dementia

For caregivers, family members, and friends.

You are not alone

Caring for someone with memory loss or dementia is not easy. It can be tiring, emotional, and sometimes confusing. But you are not alone. Many families across Nunavut are supporting Elders, parents, and other loved ones as they experience changes in thinking, memory, and behaviour.

This guide is here to help.

It offers simple, clear ideas to make daily care easier. You will find tips for how to communicate, how to manage challenges, and how to care for your own well-being too. You do not need to do everything at once. Even small changes can help make life easier at home.

We wrote this guide using plain language, with examples and ideas that make sense for life in Nunavut.

When you care for a family member, you are living these values. You are doing something important—even if it doesn't always feel easy. NDMS is here to support you.

Understanding dementia

Dementia is a word that describes changes in the brain. These changes affect how a person remembers, thinks, speaks, and acts. Dementia is not a normal part of aging. It is caused by damage to the brain, often from diseases like Alzheimer's.

Dementia can happen to anyone, but it is more common in older adults. The changes usually happen slowly over time.

Common signs of dementia

You may notice:

- Forgetting names, words, or appointments
- Repeating the same story or question
- Getting confused about time or place
- Having trouble with money, cooking, or other daily tasks
- Mood changes, sadness, or fear
- Getting upset or angry more easily
- Losing things and not knowing where to look
- Saying things that seem unusual or not in character
- Withdrawing from family or community events

These changes can be scary—for the person and for their family. It's normal to feel worried or unsure. But knowing what's happening can help you respond with care and patience.

Every person is different

Not everyone with dementia will have all of these signs. Some people change very slowly, others more quickly. Some remain gentle and calm. Others may become frustrated or afraid. There is no one right way to live with dementia—each person is unique.

Dementia can't be cured, but with support, people can still have comfort, dignity, and connection. As a caregiver, you can make a big difference in their quality of life.

Daily care

Supporting someone with dementia at home can be challenging—but simple changes can help make daily life safer and calmer for everyone. This section shares ideas to support everyday routines like meals, bathing, rest, and getting dressed.

Create a calm and safe space

- Keep the home quiet and comfortable.
- Use soft lighting and reduce clutter.
- Try to keep familiar objects around—for example, a parka, sewing tools, or a family photo.
- Use labels or pictures to show what’s in drawers or rooms (like “toilet” or “food”).

Follow simple routines

- Try to keep the day predictable. Wake up, eat, and rest at the same times each day if possible.
- Use gentle reminders, such as “It’s lunchtime now” or “Let’s put on your socks.”
- Avoid rushing. Give the person extra time for each task.

Make meals easier

- Offer favourite foods in small portions.
- Reduce noise during meals (avoid TV or radio).
- Sit together and eat slowly.
- If chewing or swallowing is hard, ask your healthcare provider for ideas.

Help with getting dressed

- Lay out clothing in the right order (underwear on top, then shirt, pants, and socks).
- Offer clothes with simple buttons or stretchy waistbands.
- Provide options. For example, say: “Would you like the blue shirt or the red one?”

Bathing and hygiene

- Keep the bathroom warm.
- Use towels or cloths that feel familiar.

- Explain each step calmly. For example, say: “Now I’m helping you wash your back.”
- If the person resists bathing, try again later. It doesn’t have to happen every day.

Encourage rest and relaxation

- Gentle movement during the day (like walking or stretching) can help with sleep.
- Try calming activities like listening to music, storytelling, or looking at photo albums.
- Reduce screen time before bed.

Staying connected

- If the person enjoys company, try to keep them involved in family or community life.
- Invite friends or relatives to visit, even just for a short time.
- Sit together to sew, play music, tell stories, or share tea.
- If there’s a local drop-in program or Elders’ group, ask if they can attend.
- Even short visits or greetings can lift someone’s mood.

Appointments and medicine

- Use a calendar or checklist to keep track of clinic visits and appointments.
- Plan extra time to get ready.
- Bring snacks, tissues, or items that feel comforting.
- Bring a list of concerns to share with the healthcare provider.
- Use a pill organizer or reminder system for medicine.
- Store medicine out of reach if there is a risk the person might take it too often or at the wrong time.
- If the person resists taking medication, speak with a health provider about safe options.

Communication tips

When someone has dementia, talking and understanding can become harder—for both of you. They may have trouble finding the right words, following conversations, or remembering things you've already said.

Still, it's possible to connect with care and respect. Words aren't the only way we communicate—tone, body language, patience, and love all matter.

Speak in a calm and friendly way

- Use a gentle voice and kind expression.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Give the person time to respond—don't rush or interrupt.

Use names and familiar language

- Say the person's name often.
- Remind them who you are, gently. For example, say: "It's me, Johnnie, your nephew."
- Talk about familiar people, places, or events.

Use non-verbal communication

- Make eye contact when speaking.
- Use hand gestures or pictures to explain things.
- A light touch on the hand or shoulder can be calming (if the person is okay with touch).
- Sit beside or at eye level rather than standing over the person.

Reduce distractions

- Turn off TVs or radios when you're talking.
- Choose a quiet space when possible.

- Make sure the person can see and hear you clearly. If they wear glasses or hearing aids, check that they have them.

Be kind—even if you feel frustrated

- It’s okay if the person repeats things or forgets what you said.
- Try not to correct them harshly—it can cause confusion or frustration.
- If they say something that doesn’t make sense, respond to the emotion behind it instead of the exact words.

Here are some examples of ways you can respond:

If they say...	Instead of responding...	You can say...
“I need to go pick up the kids from school!”	“The kids are grown now. You don’t need to get them.”	“You must really love your family. They’re lucky to have you.”
“My mother’s coming over soon—I need to clean up!”	“Your mother passed away years ago.”	“You always like to keep a tidy home. Let’s do a little cleaning together.”
“Someone stole my mittens!”	“Nobody stole them—you just lost them again.”	“Oh no, that must feel upsetting. Let’s look together and try to find them.”

These responses honour the person’s feelings while also being calm and respectful.

Responding to difficult behaviour

Sometimes, people with dementia act in ways that are unexpected or hard to handle. They might get upset, afraid, confused, or angry. They may say things that feel hurtful. They may do things that don’t make sense to others.

These changes are not anyone's fault. Dementia affects how the brain works, and that can make everyday situations feel overwhelming.

The key is to respond with calm, care, and patience.

Common behaviours you may notice

- Yelling or arguing
- Saying confusing or untrue things
- Wandering or trying to leave home
- Getting angry during meals, bathing, or dressing
- Accusing others of stealing or hiding things
- Refusing to take medicine or go to appointments

Why does this happen?

Dementia can make it hard to understand the world around you. Loud noises, changes in routine, pain, hunger, or even needing the toilet can all cause distress. The person may not be able to explain what's wrong.

What you can do

Stay calm

- Speak softly and slowly.
- Keep your body language relaxed.
- Try not to argue, even if what they're saying isn't true.

Validate their feelings

- Say things like: "I see you're upset," or "That sounds scary."
- Focus on comfort, not correcting.
- Let them know they're safe and not alone.

Look for the cause

- Are they too hot or cold? Hungry? In pain?
- Did something in the environment change (a loud sound, a visitor)?
- Try to meet the need, not just stop the behaviour.

Redirect gently

- Offer a different activity or topic.
- Suggest going for a walk, having a snack, or listening to music.
- Keep things simple. For example, say: “Let’s sit down here for a bit.”

If safety is a concern

- If the person becomes violent, physically aggressive, or tries to leave in unsafe conditions, seek help.
- Talk to a healthcare provider about a safety plan.
- In emergencies, contact local health services right away.

Caring for yourself

Caring for a family member with dementia is a powerful act of love and service. But it can also be tiring, stressful, and overwhelming. This is especially true if you’re doing it alone or without enough support.

You may feel guilt, sadness, frustration, or grief. These feelings are normal. You are doing your best.

You deserve support too.

How to tell if you’re becoming overwhelmed

Caring for someone with dementia takes energy—emotional, mental, and physical. Over time, it’s normal to feel tired or worn down. But if you start to feel this way often, it could be a sign of caregiver stress.

Here are some signs to watch for:

- Feeling angry, frustrated, or hopeless
- Feeling resentful of the person you're caring for, or denying or minimizing their symptoms
- Withdrawing from friends or activities you used to enjoy
- Worrying a lot or feeling anxious about the future
- Feeling sad much of the time
- Not sleeping well, or feeling tired all day
- Crying more easily or getting upset over small things
- Having trouble concentrating or finishing everyday tasks
- Not eating well, or getting sick more often

These are not signs of weakness. They are signs that you need support, care, and rest.

Ways to take care of yourself

Rest when you can

- Take short breaks during the day, even just for a few minutes.
- Sleep is important — ask a friend or relative to help so you can nap or have quiet time.

Share the care

- You don't have to do everything on your own.
- Ask family members, neighbours, or community members to help.
- Talk to your local health centre about respite care or home care services.

Talk to someone you trust

- A friend, Elder, health worker, or community wellness worker can be a good listener.

- You don't need to have the answers. The act of sharing can help you feel less alone.

Keep learning

- You'll build skills over time through patience, experience, and support.
- Give yourself credit for what you're learning.

If things feel too heavy

- Feeling tired, frustrated, or sad doesn't mean you're doing a bad job. It means you're human.
- Asking for help is a strength, not a weakness.
- Contact your local health centre or NDMS if you need support, advice, or just someone to talk to.

Where to get help

Support is available across Nunavut—whether you need information, someone to talk to, or help with daily care.

NDMS—Nunavummi Disabilities Makinnasuaqtiit Society

We support Nunavummiut living with disabilities, including memory loss and dementia.

We offer:

- Plain-language resources in English and Inuktitut
- Support for caregivers
- Connections to community services
- Advocacy and education

Other supports

- **Local health centres.** Nunavut has health centres located in various communities across the territory. Healthcare providers and staff can assist with dementia-related check-ups, medication, referrals, and questions. Visit nu211.ca to search for local services.

- **Community wellness programs.** These may include Elder support groups, mental wellness services, or local counsellors. Visit [Community Wellness Programs](#) to find out more.
- **Government programs.** The Home, Community, and Continuing Care program helps Nunavummiut care for themselves with help from family and community members. This helps with their sense of independence and well-being. Services include homemaking, personal care, nursing care, respite care, and rehabilitation/recovery exercises. Visit the [HCC program](#) to learn more.
- **Government services.** The [Department of Family Services](#) can help with respite, income support, or social work.
- **Alzheimer Society.** Visit [Help and Information](#) for persons who are caring with someone with dementia.
- [Kamatsiaqtut Nunavut Helpline](#). If you are feeling overwhelmed, the helpline is available 24 hours a day: 867-979-3333 in Iqaluit or toll-free at 1-800-265-3333.

Thinking about the future

Planning ahead can reduce stress later on. If your family member is still able to make decisions, now is a good time to talk gently about:

- What kind of care they would want later
- Who should help make decisions
- Finances, housing, and health care

You can also think about what might happen if you become too tired or unwell to provide care. Making a plan can help your whole family feel more prepared.

You are doing meaningful work

Caring for someone with dementia isn't always easy—but it matters deeply.