**CARING FOR THE ELDERLY WITH DEMENTIA DURING COVID 19**

**NIMHANS COGNITIVE DISORDERS CLINIC**

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**AADAR DEMENTIA SCIENCE PROGRAMME, NIMHANS**

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the elderly population and especially those with dementia and other cognitive disorders are more vulnerable and likely to face experiences that are difficult and unfamiliar. Caring for an elderly person with dementia, in the background of implementing preventive measures against COVID 19 can appear quite difficult and challenging. It is important during this time to be informed, stay safe and to seek the support of your medical professional and the resources that are available in your community. NIMHANS, along with the AADAR Dementia Science Programme team, would like to support our elderly with dementia through this difficult time. While the risk of COVID-19 will vary among people with dementia and their carers, currently depending upon where they stay and their level of susceptibility to infection, the effects of isolation will be more universal and is likely to be challenging.

**Anticipating and preparing for challenges is the key:**

* A person with dementia who is staying at home during this time of preventive measures and isolation, may be confused when their normal routine is interrupted, as the caregiver is mandated to take safety measures. Furthermore, the paid caregiver with whom they are comfortable and familiar with, may not be able to come in to assist them. The person with dementia may also not recognise the need for any of the preventative measures taken by their family. Handwashing and not touching one’s face are difficult to communicate or implement in a person with dementia. In such situations, persons with dementia may show challenging behavioural symptoms such as confusion, restlessness, wandering, agitation, poor sleep pattern etc.
* A person with dementia living at an assisted living facility can also be affected, as the lockdown prevents routine group activities, contact with family members and access to routine clinical services. The safety measures taken are important and additional efforts are being made by facilities to make the individual less anxious or insecure.
* In the event of any person with dementia developing COVID 19, the symptoms of fever, sore throat may not be recognised or communicated, delaying diagnosis. It is likely that infection manifests as atypically as dullness, apathy, agitation, refusal to eat and other behavioural changes. Furthermore, isolating a person with dementia with the infection can be difficult since they may not understand the reason for being kept apart.

These situations can create difficult behavioural responses in people with dementia and stress to the caregivers.

**It will help to understand the reasons for the behaviour and adopt a few strategies to reduce the impact:**

* Access support for persons with dementia and their caregivers though virtual platforms, telephonic calls to the physician. To bring patient to hospitals only in the event of an emergency, to minimise risk of exposure.
* Persons with early dementia can be encouraged and frequently prompted and reminded to maintain physical distance from others and to wash hands. Persons with dementia and their carers can carry out basic physical exercises and relaxation techniques. Engage in video/telephonic conversation with family and friends, seeking their and community support if needed. Recreate interest in music or art or any other hobbies. Carrying out changes such as making their immediate environment more soothing can help address certain behavioural issues.
* Positive simple communication techniques should be used by carers for persons with dementia to initiate activities and provide daily encouragement and reassurance at signs of stress.
* If the person with dementia requires isolation, create a special space for them, adjust the lighting, play soothing music and ask the caregiver/staff to communicate with them in simple language. Carers are expected to listen to the person with dementia, attend to their feelings and validate their emotional experience.
* Providing psychological first aid for people with dementia and carers is important. Paying attention to their concerns and providing comfort for people who may have been in contact with someone infected with Covid-19 is crucial. It is important to give them the confidence that they are not alone.
* Rotating of caregivers at home, so as to provide respite time for each caregiver is crucial due to their responsibilities and stress.
* Persons with dementia and their carers are requested to postpone their routine follow up appointments if it is not an emergency. In the event of an emergency, you are requested to contact your nearest government hospital, or your local physician who be able to assist you.
* In summary, continuity of care for the person with dementia must ensure the safety of the person with dementia and their carers. Points to be noted are as follows:
* Keep stock of essential medications and have an emergency contact ready.
* Follow mental health and psychological support strategies described earlier.
* Continue with the daily routine as best as possible.
* Engage with online self- help groups for psychological support.
* Connect with associations like the local chapter of Alzheimer’s and Related Disorders Society of India for more information (ARDSI) in your city.
* For further information or help with these concerns, please contact us on +91 9686248282 or [dementia.nimhans@gmail.com](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Callad%5CDownloads%5Cdementia.nimhans%40gmail.com).

More information can also be availed at:

<https://www.alz.co.uk/news/adi-offers-advice-and-support-during-covid-19>

[https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/coronavirus-(covid-19)-tips-for-dementia-care](https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/coronavirus-%28covid-19%29-tips-for-dementia-care)