

Understanding Dementia: A Caregiver's Guide

Supporting families with knowledge, compassion, and practical tools.

Northern Virginia Dementia Support & Workplace Alliance
A program of My Natural Me

Welcome

Whether your loved one was diagnosed yesterday or years ago, you've likely experienced uncertainty, grief, frustration, and love—all in the same day. You are not alone. Dementia changes the brain, but it does not erase the person you love.

Big Sis Tip: You don't have to become the perfect caregiver. You simply need to become the caregiver your loved one needs today.

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a general term describing conditions that affect memory, thinking, language, judgment, and daily functioning. Common types include Alzheimer's disease, Vascular Dementia, Lewy Body Dementia, Frontotemporal Dementia, and Mixed Dementia.

Common early signs:

- Memory loss disrupting daily life
- Difficulty finding words
- Repeating questions
- Confusion about time
- Mood or personality changes

Understanding the Stages

Early: Mostly independent with reminders.

Middle: Needs increasing help with daily tasks and communication.

Late: May require full-time care, but connection through love, music, laughter, and gentle touch remains meaningful.

Communicating

Do: Speak slowly, maintain eye contact, ask one question at a time, and redirect instead of arguing.

Avoid: Quizzing memory, correcting every mistake, or saying 'I already told you.'

Big Sis Tip: They may forget the conversation, but they'll often remember how you made them feel.

Caring for Yourself

Caregivers often experience stress, anxiety, isolation, and burnout. Caring for yourself is part of caring for your loved one.

- ☐ Have I eaten today?
- ☐ Have I had water?
- ☐ Have I asked for help this week?
- ☐ When did I last laugh?

When to Ask for Help

Reach out when safety becomes a concern, wandering begins, caregiving affects your health, or you simply don't know what to do next.

You Are Not Alone

Celebrate the small victories—a smile, a shared laugh, a favorite song, or a peaceful afternoon. Those moments matter.

Resources: dementiacaregiversupport.org