

Changing relationships: partners

As dementia progresses, the relationship between spouse/partners changes, even as the need for love and affection remains.

Given your partner's cognitive decline, you may no longer be able to have the same emotional or physical intimacy that you once shared.

You may be feeling enormous grief over the changes in your relationship. You are not selfish for experiencing these feelings.

Roles and decision making:

- Your partner may have handled things that you have to learn to do.
- You have to make decisions alone that you used to make together.

Romance: Dementia makes communication more difficult.

- You may lose the sense of companionship and need to find different ways to express feelings.

Intimacy: When one person has dementia, couples are often able to continue to have a close, intimate relationship for many years.

- When changes do affect the physical relationship, it is important to remember that every couple deals with these changes in their own way.
- It is typical that people with dementia experience changes in their sexual drive – increase or decrease.
- It's also common for caregivers to lose sexual desire because of the demands of caregiving, the change from partner to caregiver, and your partner's personality changes due to dementia.
- Do not feel guilty if your sexual attraction to your partner has changed. You can find new ways to connect with each other.

How to stay connected:

- Find enjoyable activities to share during visits.
- Even if your partner moves into residential care, most places can provide overnight private accommodation for you to be alone.
- Whether it's a cuddle on the sofa or much more than that, physical intimacy can still bring comfort, support and pleasure for many years to come – for both of you.

What if they forget me?

As the disease progresses, your partner may no longer recognize you. This can be very difficult and you will need a lot of support.

If your partner becomes affectionate or involved with a new partner, it is important that both participants agree to the new relationship. Get support from care providers around how to handle the situation.

Articles for spouses and partners of people with dementia

Dementia and your relationships: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia/relationships-and-dementia/>

Changes to Your Relationship: <https://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-relationship-changes.asp>

How relationships change: <http://www.alzheimer.ca/en/Home/Living-with-dementia/Staying-connected/How-relationships-change>

Intimacy and sexuality: <http://www.alzheimer.ca/en/Home/Living-with-dementia/Understanding-behaviour/Intimacy-and-sexuality>

Let's talk about sex... and dementia: <https://www.unforgettable.org/blog/lets-talk-about-sex-and-dementia/>

Changes in Intimacy and Sexuality in Alzheimer's Disease:
<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/changes-intimacy-and-sexuality-alzheimers-disease>

Intimacy and Sexuality: Resources for Dementia Caregivers:
<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/intimacy-and-sexuality-resources-dementia-caregivers>

Changing relationships: when your parent has dementia

The reversal of roles can be difficult for both parents and “Adult Children”

- You might appreciate the chance to be able to care for your parents as they once did for you.
- You might resent having to take care of a parent when you have not had a good relationship.
- It can be awkward or embarrassing for a parent to receive care from someone they cared for in often-similar manners in the early stages of their life.
- It can feel unnatural to help your parent with bathing or toileting.

How to talk about decision making.

- Have important conversations when your parent is at their best – when they are most alert. Avoid talking about significant topics when there are other things going on, when there are multiple people around, when they have just been involved in a busy activity, etc.
- Introduce topics gently. Voice your own concerns and feelings: “I’m worried about your safety” – then ask them to think of solutions with you.
- Have a third party help you: their doctor, a care consultant, a counselor. Be sure to talk about your approach and priorities before you meet together with your parent.

How to honor your parent.

- Ask them as early as you can about what is important to them, what their values are, what would they prefer or not like in terms of where they would live, what kind of assistance they would receive, who they would like to provide the assistance, etc.
- Write these things down, and tell your parent you are keeping track of this information to be able to follow their directions.
- They have the right to make their own choices, so let them have a choice whenever possible.

What if they don’t recognize me anymore?

- People in comas often hear conversation around them. If this is so, how can we know for certain what a person with dementia can understand?
- Care lovingly for them, speak to them with respect, treat them as functioning human beings, no matter what their condition appears to be. If you put forward your best effort to treat them in this fashion, they will have perceived whatever they are capable of comprehending. Hopefully, at the very least, they perceive that they are loved.
- Provide them with the interaction, love and comfort that they need.

What if I wasn’t treated well as a child?

- If your relationship with your parents was a poor one when you were growing up, or if it still is strained, think carefully about what role you want to and should play in their care.
- Involving other siblings or professionals may be best.
- If you aren’t the best one for the job, let someone else do it. You have no legal obligation to take care of your parents.

Articles for adult children of parents with dementia:

When the Caregiving Dynamic Is Complicated: <http://www.caringnews.com/en/164/1/415/When-the-Caregiving-Dynamic-Is-Complicated.htm>

Tough Issues: Elders Who Abuse Their Family Caregivers: <https://www.agingcare.com/articles/elders-abusing-their-adult-children-or-caregivers-137122.htm>

Dementia: How to Care for Ageing Parents: <https://www.elder.org/dementia-care/dementia-how-to-care-for-aging-parents/>

Becoming Your Parent's Caregiver: <https://www.aplaceformom.com/blog/2-24-14-caregiver-questions-to-as/>

10 Factors to Consider Before Moving Elderly Parents In: <https://www.caring.com/articles/moving-in-aging-relative-or-parent>

When Your Parent Has Dementia - On dealing with complex emotions: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/21st-century-aging/201710/when-your-parent-has-dementia>

8 ways to deal with false dementia accusations: <http://dailycaring.com/8-ways-to-deal-with-false-dementia-accusations/>

8 Expert Tips for When Aging Parents Won't Listen: <https://www.aplaceformom.com/blog/2-25-15-expert-tips-when-parents-wont-listen/>

Dementia Made a New Man Out of My Dad: <http://narrative.ly/dementia-made-a-new-man-out-of-my-dad/>

When Parents & Adult Children Do Not Get Along: <http://www.holisticaging.com/parents-children-getting-along/>