

# Medical Hospitalization & Dementia: What Families Should Know

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Hospital stays can be particularly stressful for people living with dementia. Unfamiliar environments, disrupted routines, medical illness, and frequent interactions with new healthcare providers can worsen confusion and increase the risk of delirium. Families and caregivers play an important role in helping hospital staff understand the person's needs and maintain comfort and safety.

## Why Hospitalization Can Be Difficult for People with Dementia

- Unfamiliar environment and routines
- Noise and bright lights
- Frequent interruptions for tests and vital signs
- Difficulty understanding what is happening
- Increased risk of delirium (sudden confusion)

## Common Challenges During Hospital Stays

- Increased confusion or agitation
- Sleep disruption
- Refusal of medications or treatments
- Wandering or attempts to leave the room
- Difficulty communicating pain or symptoms

## How Families Can Help

### Share Important Information

- Provide staff with information about the person's routines
- Share communication preferences and calming strategies
- Inform staff about hearing aids, glasses, or mobility needs

### Bring Familiar Items

- Family photos
- A favorite blanket or pillow
- Familiar music or comfort objects

## Support Orientation

- Use clocks and calendars
- Remind the person where they are and why
- Speak calmly and clearly

## Encourage Mobility and Daytime Activity

- Ask staff about safe walking or movement
- Encourage daytime activity to support nighttime sleep

## Medication Awareness

- Some medications may worsen confusion
- Ask staff to review medications carefully
- Inform providers about past medication reactions

## Reducing Risk of Delirium

- Ensure glasses and hearing aids are used
- Encourage hydration and nutrition
- Promote regular sleep routines when possible
- Maintain familiar routines and reassurance

## Questions Families May Ask the Care Team

- What is the main medical problem being treated?
- What tests or procedures are planned?
- What medications are being used?
- How can we help reduce confusion or agitation?
- What is the plan for discharge?

## Planning for Discharge

- Ask about follow-up appointments
- Review medication changes
- Discuss safety needs at home
- Consider rehabilitation or additional support services

## National Organizations & Resources

✓ Alzheimer's Association

☎ 800-272-3900 | 🌐 [alz.org](http://alz.org)

✓ National Institute on Aging

🌐 [nia.nih.gov](http://nia.nih.gov)

✓ Family Caregiver Alliance

🌐 [caregiver.org](http://caregiver.org)

✓ Eldercare Locator

☎ 1-800-677-1116 | 🌐 [eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov)

## Final Notes

- Hospital stays can increase confusion for people with dementia.
- Familiar routines, reassurance, and family involvement can reduce stress.
- Families should communicate openly with the healthcare team to support safe care.