

# Refusal of Care in Dementia: A Guide for Patients & Families

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People living with dementia may sometimes refuse help with daily care such as bathing, taking medications, dressing, eating, or attending medical appointments. This behavior can be frustrating and confusing for caregivers. In most cases, refusal of care is not intentional. It often happens because the person feels confused, afraid, embarrassed, or overwhelmed. Understanding the reasons behind refusal and using supportive communication strategies can help reduce conflict and improve cooperation.

## Common Situations Where Care May Be

### Refused

- Bathing or showering
- Taking medications
- Dressing or grooming
- Eating meals
- Attending medical appointments
- Accepting help from caregivers

## Why Refusal of Care Happens

- Confusion about what is happening
- Fear or anxiety
- Feeling embarrassed or loss of privacy
- Feeling a loss of independence
- Physical discomfort or pain
- Depression or mood changes
- Overstimulation or fatigue

## Helpful Ways to Respond

### Stay Calm and Patient

- Speak in a calm and reassuring voice
- Avoid arguing or forcing the person
- Give the person time to process what you are saying

### Use Simple Explanations

- Use short and clear instructions
- Avoid complicated explanations
- Repeat gently if needed

### Offer Choices

- Offer simple choices such as “Would you like the blue shirt or the green one?”
- Giving choices helps preserve a sense of control

### Try Again Later

- If the person refuses care, try again after a short break
- Mood and cooperation may improve later

### Reduce Stress in the Environment

- Keep the environment calm and quiet
- Avoid rushing the person
- Maintain consistent daily routines

### When to Seek Medical Advice

- If refusal of care becomes frequent or severe
- If medications are repeatedly refused
- If there are sudden behavior changes
- If the person becomes aggressive or unsafe

### Tips for Caregivers

- Try to understand what the person may be feeling
- Focus on comfort and reassurance
- Use gentle redirection instead of confrontation
- Ask for help from family members or professional caregivers
- Take breaks to avoid caregiver burnout

## 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

- Refusal of care is a common behavior in dementia and often reflects fear or confusion.
- Gentle communication and flexible approaches can improve cooperation.
- Caregivers should seek support when caregiving becomes overwhelming.