GRACE HOME SUPPORT SERVICES

GUIDE FOUR

After a dementia diagnosis: what to do first

the first six months, gently.

A free guide from Grace Home Support Services

Grace Home Support Services

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Office visits by appointment only

This guide is general information, not legal, financial or medical advice.

A diagnosis is a piece of information, not an instant to-do list. This guide is for the first six months, in the order most families find useful. Read it when you are ready. Nothing in it spoils if you wait a few weeks.

1 Nothing has to be decided this week

A diagnosis opens a long, slow, changeable road. The practical things below can happen over months.

If you do nothing this month except let it settle, that is a reasonable month. Families who rush the paperwork and skip the rest tend to come back to the rest anyway.

2 Who to connect with now

The Alzheimer Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories runs the First Link programme. First Link connects people living with dementia, and their families, to support, education and community resources after a diagnosis.

You can be referred by your doctor, or contact the Edmonton office directly on 1-866-950-5465, or by email at help@alzheimer.ab.ca.

It includes one-to-one support, education sessions and support groups. If you make one phone call this month, make this one.

3 The four conversations worth having early

Have them while things are calm. Not because anything is about to happen, but because calm is when these conversations are possible.

1. Finances: what there is, and who can sign what.
2. Driving: what the healthcare team has advised, and how the family will handle it when the time comes.
3. Who makes decisions if they cannot, and the legal paperwork for that.
4. What this person actually wants their days to look like.

The fourth one is the one families skip, and the one people most often wish they had asked. Ask it early, and write the answers down.

For legal and financial paperwork, get proper advice from a lawyer or financial professional. This guide does not give it.

4 Keep the familiar

Routine. The same chair. The same mug. The same radio station. Familiarity is not sentimental. It is how a person stays oriented.

When a great deal is shifting, these small constants do real work. Protect them, even when a change would be more convenient for you.

5 Change how you answer, not what you say

If they ask the same question five times, answer it kindly five times. To them, it is the first time.

Correcting a mistaken belief usually costs more than it gives. It takes them through the loss again, and it rarely sticks. Meet the feeling underneath the question, and the question often stops.

6 Help them keep doing what they can do

Folding laundry. Setting the table. Wiping a counter. Purpose matters more than the task being done perfectly.

Let the towels be folded their way. The point is not the towels.

7 What to watch for as things change

- **The moments that used to work** and now do not.
- **New difficulty with the sequence of a task,** like getting dressed in the wrong order.
- **Restlessness in the late afternoon** that was not there before.
- **Wandering,** or getting lost on a route they know.
- **Refusing to wash or change clothes.**

These are reasons to talk to the care team. They are not reasons to panic. A home care assessment through 811 is a sensible next step, and you can ask for one without deciding anything else.

8 For the caregiver

Exhaustion is not a character flaw, and needing help is not a failure. It is a workload, and workloads have limits.

Respite is a maintenance decision, not a luxury. It is how the person doing the caring keeps going, and how your parent keeps the daughter or son they know, rather than a tired version of them.

9 How we can help

We provide dementia and Alzheimer's support built around one person's routines, preferences and personal history. That can mean companionship and everyday help at home, shaped around what is familiar to them.

We also provide family caregiver respite: scheduled, reliable care so that you can rest, work, run errands or attend an appointment, knowing your loved one is safely supported at home.

This guide is general information, not legal, financial or medical advice. For health concerns, follow your healthcare team's instructions and call 811 for health advice, or 911 in an emergency.

A COMPLIMENTARY FAMILY CARE CONSULTATION

If you’d like to talk it through

You do not have to work all of this out alone, and you do not have to arrive with the right questions.

We offer a complimentary family care consultation. It is a conversation, not a sales call. We will listen to what is happening at home, explain the options in plain language, and tell you honestly what we can and cannot help with.

If now is not the right time, keep this guide. It will still be here when it is.

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