

Tips for Living Alone With Early-Stage Dementia

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Have you, or has someone you love, recently been diagnosed with [mild cognitive impairment](#), early-stage [Alzheimer's disease](#), [vascular dementia](#), [Lewy body dementia](#), or a [frontotemporal disorder](#)? Do you worry about how to manage if you live alone? If so, these tips offer ways to help cope with changes in memory and thinking, prepare for the future, and stay active and engaged.

Make Everyday Tasks Easier



Many people with early-stage dementia continue to manage their everyday activities. But it's important to look ahead to a time when performing daily tasks will be harder. The sooner you adopt new strategies to help you cope with changes, the more time you will have to adjust to them. Here are some tips:

- **Organizing your days.** Write down to-do lists, appointments, and events in a notebook or calendar. You can also keep track of activities with computer software or a smartphone app. Some people have an area in their home, such as an entryway table or bench, where they store important items or organize the things they need each day. You may also want to consider using a digital clock that displays the day of the week and date, in addition to the time.
- **Paying bills.** Setting up automated payments is an easy way to pay your bills correctly and on time without having to write checks. Many companies and banks offer this service at no extra charge. You can set up automatic payments with your utility providers, insurance companies, bank, and mortgage company or leasing office. Also consider asking someone you trust to help you pay bills. That person could review your financial statements and ask you about anything unusual.
- **Shopping for meals.** Many stores offer grocery delivery services, usually for a small fee. You can also order fresh or frozen meals online or by phone. [Meals on Wheels America](#) (888-998-6325) can deliver free or low-cost meals to your home, too, and this service sometimes includes a short visit and safety check. Other possible sources of meals include religious communities and senior centers. If you make your own meals at home, consider easy-to-prepare items, such as foods that you can heat in the microwave.

- **Taking medications.** Several products can help you manage medications. You can try a weekly pillbox, a pillbox that gives you a notification (such as an alarm or vibration) when it's time to take medicine, or an automatic medication dispenser. You can buy these items at a drugstore or online, but you may need someone to help you set these up. Or try an electronic reminder system, such as a smartphone app or an alarm you set on your phone or computer.
- **Using transportation.** If you drive, you may find that you become confused, get lost, or need help with directions more often than before. Talk with your doctor about these changes. If family or friends express concerns about your driving, take their concerns seriously. Some people [decide to give up driving](#) and learn how to use public transportation or ride sharing. Neighbors, volunteers, or ride services for older adults may also be able to help with transportation.

For more suggestions on living independently, see [Aging in Place: Growing Older at Home](#).

• Find Help in Your Community

To learn about community-based support services, including food and transportation options:

- Contact the [Eldercare Locator](#) at 1-800-677-1116. This nationwide service from the Administration on Aging connects older Americans and their caregivers with local support resources.
- Search the website of your local or state government or [tribal nation](#).
- Visit the [State Health Insurance Assistance Program](#)
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- or call 877-839-2675. This program, which has offices in each state, provides one-on-one counseling and assistance with Medicare, Medicaid, and related programs.
- Reach out to local social service agencies, community centers, senior centers, and religious communities.

Scan Your Home for Safety

Making minor changes in your home can create a safer environment. For example:



Get rid of unused items and extra furniture. If there are things you no longer use (such as clothing, appliances, decorations, and furniture), now is the time to remove them. Consider giving items to family and friends or donating items in good condition to a charity. Some organizations will pick items up from your home.

- **Remove items that you may trip over.** Move electrical cords, pick up throw rugs, and look for other things you might trip over. Falls can cause injury and disability that may make it difficult to live alone. Read more about [fall prevention](#).
- **Install an automatic shut-off switch on the stove.** This switch can help prevent a fire from starting if the stove is left on accidentally. If necessary, have your stove disabled. Consider using a microwave or cooking device with an automatic shut-off, such as a slow cooker or rice cooker, to heat up food.
- **Set the water heater at 120 °F.** This setting will help you to avoid burns from scalding tap water and may help save money, too!
- **Improve bathroom safety.** Add nonskid mats to showers and tubs. Also consider installing grab bars in the tub or shower. Add a nightlight in the bathroom or hallway and keep a flashlight near your bed for trips to the bathroom at night.
- **Carry identification with you.** Medical ID bracelets and necklaces are helpful in case you get lost or need help. In an emergency, an ID can also let emergency responders know if you have allergies or special medical needs.
- **Consider getting safety devices to alert others in an emergency.** Personal safety devices you may want to consider include fall monitors, emergency call buttons, and GPS tracking systems. Talk to your doctor or social worker about finding an alert system to notify family and friends if you fall, become ill, or get lost.
- **Make sure smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are installed and working throughout your home.** These detectors should be installed in or near the kitchen and all bedrooms. Set reminders to check the batteries every six months.
- **Get help with home maintenance and organization.** Ask a family member or hire a professional service to help with tasks like managing clutter and making home repairs. Add labels to cabinets and drawers to make it easier to find flashlights, fire extinguishers, and other safety items quickly.

For more home safety tips, read the [Home Safety Checklist for Alzheimer's Disease](#).

Prepare for the Future



Preparing for the future may be difficult to think about. But by starting discussions with family and friends early, everyone can help make decisions together. Talk about health and finances now, rather than later, to make sure you have a say in future decisions.

Discuss decisions about health and finances as soon as possible to ensure that others, including your doctor and family,

understand your preferences for your late-stage or end-of-life decisions.

Other ways to prepare for the future include:

- **Get legal and financial matters in order as soon as possible.** Prepare or update your will, [living will](#), and durable powers of attorney for health care and finances. If you need legal advice, call your lawyer, or contact the [National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys](#) (703-942-5711) to find an attorney. Be sure to let someone you trust know where your documents are kept or give them a copy. [Read to learn more about advance care planning.](#)
- **Understand your options for in-home care.** Family members and friends may be able to help with everyday activities. If you need more help, look into options for a personal care assistant or home health care aide. Consider the costs of these services and whether any of the costs are covered by insurance. Check with your insurance provider(s) and resources like [Benefits.gov](#) and [BenefitsCheckUp](#)
- to find out about benefits you may qualify for. Learn more about [long-term care](#) and [how to pay for it.](#)
- **Plan for care when you can no longer live alone.** There will likely come a time when you need more day-to-day care and support. Could a family member or caregiver move in with you? Or could you move in with them? [Professional home care](#), [assisted living communities](#), and [nursing homes](#) are other options.
- **If you work, consider your options.** You could share your diagnosis with your employer and discuss how to adjust your work. Under the [Americans With Disabilities Act](#), employers with more than 15 employees are required to provide reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. This might include changing your hours, getting reminders, or splitting up large tasks. Learn more about [Alzheimer's and employment](#)
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- **Find out about potential disability benefits if you are no longer able to work.** People with dementia may be eligible for disability income through private disability insurance (if you purchased this previously), Social Security, or [veterans' benefits](#). A Social Security program called [Compassionate Allowances](#) ensures quick review of disability benefit claims for people with conditions including early-onset Alzheimer's and several other types of dementia.

Strengthen Your Support System

Family members, friends, or other caregivers may be able to help in different ways. Here are some suggestions:

Identify family and friends who can help. Talk to them about your diagnosis and ask if they can



visit you regularly and be an emergency contact. Write down and save their phone numbers and other contact information in an obvious place, such as on your refrigerator door or in your wallet or mobile phone. Even family members who live far away can help. Read about [long-distance caregiving](#).

- **Consider sharing your diagnosis with neighbors you trust.** Neighbors are often the first people to notice if someone is wandering or looks lost and they may be able to get help. Get tips for [helping family and friends understand Alzheimer's](#).
- **Visit a health care provider.** Your primary care doctor, neurologist, or other specialist can track changes in your memory, thinking, and ability to complete everyday tasks. Ask the doctor to provide you with a care plan and write down directions (or have a family member or friend take notes during the visit). If getting to the doctor's office is difficult, ask your doctor about home visits or [telehealth appointments](#). The office may also be able to recommend home health care services or a [geriatric care manager](#), a person who helps older people find services they need.
- **Learn about home- and community-based support and services.** Social service agencies, local nonprofits, and [Area Agencies on Aging](#)

- can provide or refer you to in-home help, transportation, and meals to help you live at home. Call the [Eldercare Locator](#) (800-677-1116) to learn about services in your area. Learn more about [getting help with Alzheimer's caregiving](#).

- **Stay connected with technology.** Smartphones, computers, and tablets can connect you with family and friends through video calls, email, and social media. You may want to get products that are easy to use, such as a telephone with pictures for dialing. Whatever technology you choose, start early so you can learn the system and establish a routine. Are you unfamiliar with technology? Ask your local library or community center about classes.

- **Talk with others who share your condition.** Ask your doctor's office or a social worker about support groups in your community or hosted by nonprofit organizations. For example, the [Alzheimer's Association](#)

- has both online and in-person support groups and a 24-hour helpline (800-272-3900). Many NIA-supported [Alzheimer's Disease Research Centers](#) offer programs and events for people with Alzheimer's or a related dementia and their caregivers. Your community may also have a memory café — a place for people with dementia and their caregivers to enjoy activities and socialize.

- **Get urgent help if you need it.** If you are experiencing depression or have thoughts of harming yourself, immediate help is available. Call or text the 24-hour [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)

- at **988 or 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)**. For TTY, use your preferred **relay service or dial 711 then 988**.

• **How to help someone who lives alone with dementia**

Are you concerned about a family member, neighbor, or friend who has been diagnosed with dementia and lives alone? It can be hard to know what the person needs or how to

help. To get started, explore these NIA [resources about caring for someone](#) with Alzheimer's or a related dementia.

You can also contact the [Eldercare Locator](#) at 800-677-1116 for guidance on resources and services in your community.

Take care of your physical and mental health

Eating a healthy diet, getting regular exercise, and staying connected with others offer proven benefits for well-being. Here are some tips for taking care of your mind and body if you have early-stage dementia:



Exercise. You don't have to join a gym or spend a lot of money to be physically active. Even light housework, gardening, and walking around the neighborhood can have benefits. Experts recommend both aerobic exercise (such as walking) and strength training (such as lifting weights). [Learn more about physical activity for people with dementia.](#)

- **Eat right.** Eating healthy foods helps everyone stay well, and it's particularly important for people with dementia. [Learn more about healthy eating.](#)
- **Make sleep a priority.** Dementia often changes a person's sleeping habits. But there are [steps you can take](#) to help you get a good night's sleep, including following a regular sleep schedule.
- **Be mindful.** One way to help manage stress and reduce anxiety is a technique called mindfulness, which involves focusing awareness on the present moment without judgment. Learn more about the health benefits of [mindfulness in daily living.](#)
- **Stay social.** Spending meaningful time with others can help you cope with challenges and improve your quality of life. Join a support group, chat with family and friends regularly, or share activities you enjoy with your spouse or partner. Learn more about how to continue to [participate in activities you enjoy.](#)

You may also be interested in

- Reading more about [aging in place](#)
- Learning about [preventing falls at home](#)
- Finding information about [advance care planning](#)

For More Information on Living With Dementia

NIA Alzheimer's and related Dementias Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center
800-438-4380
adear@nia.nih.gov

www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers

The NIA ADEAR Center offers information and free print publications about Alzheimer's and related dementias for families, caregivers, and health professionals. ADEAR Center staff answer telephone, email, and written requests and make referrals to local and national resources.

Alzheimers.gov

www.alzheimers.gov

Explore the Alzheimers.gov website for information and resources on Alzheimer's and related dementias from across the federal government.

Alzheimer's Association

800-272-3900

866-403-3073 (TTY)

info@alz.org www.alz.org

Alzheimer's Foundation of America

866-232-8484

info@alzfdn.org www.alzfdn.org

Eldercare Locator

800-677-1116

eldercarelocator@USAging.org <https://eldercare.acl.gov>

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Contact NIA niaic@nia.nih.gov [800-222-2225](tel:800-222-2225)

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