

# Supporting good hearing and vision

Support for family carers providing personal care for people living with dementia



# Crossing the line

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The information provided in this booklet is general guidance and not intended to be used as formal advice. Please see your healthcare professional for more personalised advice.

All information was correct at the time of publication. It is recommended to check what is available in your area.

This booklet is one of a series of booklets developed through the 'Crossing the line' research project.

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## Hearing aid care

If the person you care for has hearing loss, ensure that hearing aids are maintained and regularly cleaned. Wearing hearing aids enables a person with dementia to participate in day-to-day conversations and share life stories and memories with family, friends, and caregivers. Improved hearing helps the person to engage in social activities, reducing feelings of isolation and frustration often experienced by individuals living with dementia.

### Top tips for caring for hearing aids

- If the person has worn a hearing aid before the dementia, then keep hearing aid routines the same to aid orientation.
- Any previous practice such as tucking the aid under hair to keep it out of sight may need to be continued.
- If a person has a new hearing aid, as it takes a long time to get used to the new sounds, help the person to persevere by encouraging them to wear the hearing aid all the time.
- Regularly clean the hearing aids to prevent buildup of wax and dirt, which can affect their effectiveness. Each hearing aid should come with specific instructions on how to keep it clean.
- In general, use a soft cloth, brush, or antiseptic wipe to remove any wax or dirt on the ear moulds, and a fine filament for the open-fit tubing. Do not immerse the hearing aid in water as this will damage the technology inside.

- Ensure batteries are replaced as needed and that the devices are functioning properly. This can be done by cupping your hand around the hearing aid. A whistling sound will indicate it is working.
- Store hearing aids in a safe and easily accessible place when not in use.
- Avoid exposing them to extreme temperatures or moisture, as these can damage the devices. Remove when showering or bathing.
- It is important to learn what settings on the aid to use in different situations, e.g. in normal surroundings or when used with a hearing loop.
- As someone's dementia progresses they may react negatively to having their ears touched. To help them know what is happening an explanation or a mirror may help (if a mirror and their reflection in it is acceptable to them).
- Remind them what the aid is and what to do with it. They may be able to insert it themselves with a little help.
- Approach from the front, show the hearing aid and explain what is to be done.
- Even with a hearing aid, it is helpful to approach someone with dementia from the front, ideally at eye level, before speaking and avoid shouting or fast speech.
- With hearing aids being so small and fiddly, having a spare is a good idea as they can so easily go missing. It is a good idea to thoroughly check rubbish bins and laundry basket if a hearing aid is lost.

## Spectacles (glasses) care

The person you care for may wear spectacles for a variety of reasons and have different pairs for different tasks. The correct spectacles will help them recognise familiar objects and people; catch up on their favourite TV programme or read a book; make a cuppa, or enjoy a view. All add to the sense of identity and reduce the risk of isolation and confusion. Some people will wear contact lenses and may alternate between lenses and spectacles.

Being able to see clearly will also make everyday tasks such as washing, dressing and going to the toilet easier. This will help the person to be as independent as possible for as long as possible and reduce the risk of falls and accidents.



## Top tips for caring for spectacles

- If the person has worn spectacles and lenses before the dementia, then keep the same routines the same to aid orientation.
- Long-term spectacle and contact lens wearers will have established routines and places where they keep their spectacles and equipment.
- Ensure spectacles are kept clean by gently wiping them with a soft lens cloth to remove smudges and dirt. Specialist lens cleaner can also be used.
- Avoid using household cleaners or abrasive materials, as these can damage the lenses or frames.
- Consider having different style of spectacles for different tasks, and discreetly labelling them and the glasses case.
- Try to keep the spectacles in the same place to avoid them being misplaced, or if safe to do so try attaching them to a lanyard or glasses chain.
- Since the risk of losing things is higher for the person who has dementia, consider having several spare pairs to hand if this is possible.
- Regular check-ups with an optician are essential for ensuring that spectacles are the right prescription and fit. Spectacles can easily become ill-fitting if dropped or sat on. Keeping them in good shape will ensure comfort and good vision.

## Contact lenses

Contact lenses may become more difficult to maintain as someone's dementia progresses. If the carer is not a lens wearer themselves, it can be particularly difficult to manage the level of hygiene required for healthy lens use and care. Most lens wearers will also have spectacles they use when they take their lenses out.

- Inserting lenses into the eyes for long-term wearers will be a well-established habit that people can manage earlier on in their dementia.
- Remembering to take lenses out before sleep can be more of a problem. The person may need prompting to do this.
- Lens technology is improving all the time so it is worth discussing this with an optician who will be able to advise on how to use lenses safely.
- Encouraging the use of spectacles rather than lenses for the longer term is generally a good idea.
- The optician will also be able to advise on the type of spectacles that would suit the person and build their confidence in spectacle wearing.

This booklet is part of a series about support for family carers providing personal care for people with dementia:

1. Why does having dementia make personal care difficult?
2. Dealing with complex emotions
3. Common physical issues that impact on personal care
4. Legal and financial issues
5. Changes to the home environment to make personal care easier
6. Strategies that will help make giving personal care easier in the long term
7. Staying strong in the long term
8. Help with continence and using the toilet
9. Help with washing, showering, and bathing
10. Help with teeth and dentures
11. Help with dressing and undressing
12. Help with eating and drinking
13. Help with personal appearance
14. Help with caring for hands and feet
15. Supporting good hearing and vision

All booklets and the information within them can be found online at: [caringhelp.on.worc.ac.uk](http://caringhelp.on.worc.ac.uk)

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The illustrations in this booklet were created by  
Rachael Brazell.