



Moving and Lifting Techniques for a person with Dementia

Introduction

Being able to move around freely provides the person with dementia with an opportunity to exercise, stay fit and retain a certain degree of independence. Walking and other forms of movement improve the circulation and promote a general feeling of wellbeing. Exercise can also help to prevent stiffness of the joints, muscle wasting and bone softening. You may find that the person with dementia does not seem to be interested in moving about and that even when you suggest doing something they have difficulty understanding what you mean. They might also have physical problems which hamper movement. However, by perseverance and encouragement, you may be able to keep them active and more independent. You may also make caring less physically exhausting for yourself and less tiring on an emotional level.

How to cope with moving and lifting

As the person with dementia may lack the incentive to move around or find it difficult to get up out of a chair, you may need to provide encouragement and assistance. They may also need encouragement to complete an action once started. It might help occasionally to say something like, "That's right, hold on to the rail" or "You're nearly there now". If the person finds it difficult to move around or to accomplish a particular action, you could perhaps try to break it down into more manageable stages.

This may take more time, so you will have to be careful not to rush the person.

It is not surprising that some people with dementia seem to be uncooperative when carers try to help them move. It is possible that they do not understand what the carer wants or dislike being handled as if they were an object. If you approach the person with dementia in a calm, relaxed way, with a smile, and take the time to explain what you are doing, you will probably find that they are more co-operative. Even if they do not understand what you are saying, they will probably find the tone of your voice and your expression reassuring. It might be possible to explain what you want to do in other ways - by demonstrating the action yourself, for example, or by gently guiding their movements. Sometimes the person might simply not feel like moving. In such cases, it is preferable to leave them for a while and try later. Helping someone to move who is unwilling is likely to be an unnecessarily strenuous task.

How to prevent the person with dementia from having problems moving around

It is best to make sure that there are no loose rugs, slippery floors, trailing wires, unsteady furniture or obstacles which may hamper movement or cause an accident. People with dementia tend to be unsteady on their feet and sometimes have visual problems such as seeing double. Make sure that neither you nor the other person is wearing slippery shoes. Grip rails along walls, both sides of staircases and in rooms (e.g. the bathroom and toilet) can be useful. Walking aids can also help. You might be able to alter the furniture to make it less of a problem, e.g. raise the height of the toilet seat, chair or bed.

Advice on lifting and helping someone to move

You should never try to carry anyone on your own as you could severely damage both yourself and the person with dementia. Even supporting someone who is very heavy or dependent can be risky, unless you are very careful. That is why it is important that you ask for advice on the safest ways to lift and support the person from an occupational therapist, physiotherapist or other professional. The following guidelines may be helpful, but you should make sure that you get someone to help you.

Advice on lifting

Keep your feet apart and firmly on the ground when lifting. Bend at the knees and hips. Keep close to the person and tell them what you want them to do. Always take your time and never take the other person's weight till you are absolutely comfortable. As lifting and twisting can damage your back, try to avoid twisting movements by rearranging furniture or taking things in easy stages. Always avoid pulling the person up by their arms as this can damage their shoulders. Finally, try to make sure there is enough room to move and there are no obstacles in the way. If at any stage, you feel that you or the other person cannot stand the weight or that you are straining yourself, stop and try to get someone else to help you.

Helping someone out of a chair

It is harder to get up from a low chair. If the chair is too low for the person a cushion on the seat may help. Chairs with firm arms will help them to manage for longer independently. First encourage the person to move to the edge of the chair. Their feet should be firmly on the ground and tucked back. One way to help, if they can co-operate is to stand at the side of the chair and take hold of the hand nearest to you, palm to palm. Put your other hand firmly against their trunk, under their arm on the opposite side. You can then support them to stand up. If the person is not able to co-operate easily, stand in front of them and put their

arms around the top of your shoulders (not your neck) and your hands against the small of their back. Your knees should be against their knees with your feet blocking their feet. If you find yourself struggling, don't carry on. It is far better to leave the person seated and seek further help.

Helping someone out of a bed

Help the person to move to the edge of the bed where you are standing. Guide them to bring their legs over the bed and then to sit, putting their feet firmly on the floor. You can then help them up as from the chair.

Helping someone up from the floor

If the person has a fall, make sure first that they are not injured. If you think they have been hurt, make them comfortable and call for help. If they are not injured you can assist them to get up by putting a firm chair at their side. Help them to kneel and place one hand on the chair, leaning against it. Take hold of the hand and support them under their arm, against their trunk with your free hand. Then encourage them to push on the chair with their other hand while you help them to stand. If you find it difficult to do this, it is better not to persist in trying as you could do more harm than good. If the person with dementia is unable to cooperate or is too heavy (and if the floor is warm and comfortable), give them a blanket and pillow and let them stay there until you can get help.

Courtesy of www.alzheimer-europe.org