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## **Coping with Dementia**

### **There is no cure for Dementia, but there are ways to slow its progress**

Although dementia is said to be often caused by Alzheimer's, it is at the lower end of the scale; initially, anyway. Apparently, 3 types of genes called Apolipoprotein E are claimed to be a factor contributing to a person's chance of developing Alzheimer's; but because everyone in the world has at least 2 of the types, it doesn't mean they will all end up suffering with the disease. Researchers continue to uncover more about these genetic causes and there have been promising results.

The problem, apparently, eventuates when contact between nerve cells, or nerve cells and muscles is interrupted, and this affects normal functions; as it does with Motor Neurone Disease. Scientists researching this particular field have developed a drug called SPG-302 which targets the areas of disruption, and it is believed that in some instances it can repair the breaks. It is also thought that the same drug may be helpful in the treatment of dementia and perhaps Alzheimer's.

Dementia is not regarded as a normal part of ageing, but is actually a brain condition which can affect anyone, no matter how old. It is, however, more common after the age of 65. But how does anyone know when it is knocking at their door? There are early signs, and should they be noticed it is wise not to dismiss them in the hopes that they will simply go away. So, what are these signs, and what can be done to minimise the progress of dementia?

Because dementia is a brain condition it affects the way a person thinks and acts. Memory, especially the short-term variety, is one of these functions, and perhaps the loss of even a small part of it could be regarded as the most frustrating. We all have occasional memory lapses from time to time which is quite natural; but when these incidents become more frequent they can cause a domino effect. Forgetting something causes frustration which, in turn, disrupts thought patterns and focus on the present.

In the past, tasks that have been performed so regularly that they were done without thinking may be of concern when a memory lapse interrupts the flow. Losing things like keys, a wallet or purse, maybe even putting them in the fridge or freezer; these are classic examples. Most people have done this on occasions, not necessarily due to dementia, but through either rushing or attempting to complete a number of jobs one on top of the other. Establishing a routine is a way to fix the problem by, let's say, returning home from the shops and on entering the house, putting the car keys in a specific place and the same with the purse; doing this before packing away the shopping.

As they grow older, people who used to multi-task may find trying to do too much at once increasingly hard. They miss something part way through, and in trying to remember

what that is, the rest of the pattern is scrambled and more things are forgotten. So be it – simply don't try to be what you were once. Instead, take it one task at a time and complete it before moving to the next on the list. And that's another way of remembering – make a list of the jobs and follow it through step by step. There's nothing wrong with that.

Routine is important. Once established and adhered to it makes life easier; but a distraction part way through can disrupt progress. Then is the time to deal with the distraction prior to thinking back from the beginning of the routine to the point where it stumbled and continue on from there as usual. Maintaining focus is also necessary, even when performing the simplest of tasks. For example: reaching for a glass of wine and knocking it over could be the result of shifting focus too soon to whatever comes next. Perhaps the TV remote is in the other hand and the intention was two-fold: have a sip of wine and change the channel. I know this might sound silly, but it is better to watch the hand moving towards the glass, fingers closing around it and picking it up properly; then, and only then, sorting the TV. It will save a lot of anguish, not to mention the inconvenience of having to clear up a mess.

Just as with exercising muscles, the same rule applies to the brain – if you don't use it, you lose it. Solving puzzles of any kind helps keep the mind active. Crosswords, jigsaws, word games such as scrabble, it doesn't matter: they not only stimulate mental recall, but also hand-eye co-ordination and focus. Video games are handy too, especially the match-three kind; and hidden-object games help link words with the images they describe, thus refreshing cognitive skills. There are many of these games available via the Internet for PC's, laptops and tablets. Reading is another pastime that reintroduces words which may be easily forgotten; and coming back to scrabble, you can play it on your own, picking out those letters which make up familiar words.

I love cooking and over the years I have amassed quite a few different recipes, so many, in fact, that I can't always remember all of the ingredients or the method; so I just pull out the recipe sheet from the file and follow it. There's no shame in that, and I know the dish is going to end up the way it should. In a similar vein, I frequently write myself reminders of forthcoming tasks; then I don't get annoyed with myself for not doing something.

So, if dementia does come knocking, simply get your brain into gear and forget about it.

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