

Tasks for Daily Living: Strategies for Caregivers

The following is a companion document to use with the video *Tasks for Daily Living: Strategies for Caregivers* produced by the Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia. These materials were designed to support family caregivers to help a person with dementia with physical transfers. An occupational therapist and physiotherapist with many years' experience in caring for seniors living with dementia provided these strategies.

We acknowledge that every situation will be different. Any decisions involving supporting someone with their activities of daily living are impacted by many factors including the frailty level and abilities of the person with dementia and the care provider, cultures, relationships, the physical set up of home and the caregiver's comfort levels. What works well for one caregiver might not be the best option for you. Communication is key. This video and handout outlines some strategies and approaches to consider. Think about them, discuss them with the person for whom you are caring, and seek professional advice if you need clarification or further options.

Tool #1: Unassisted Transfer – *standing without help*

Tool #2: Minimal Assist – *a little bit of help; cueing*

Tool #3: Assist from Low Seated Surface – *helping to stand from a low surface*

Tool #4: Transfer/Safety Belt

Tool #5: High Piece of Furniture – *the benefits of standing up from a higher surface*

Tool #6: Lie to Sit and Sit to Lie – *getting in and out of bed*

Tool #7: Assist to Toilet or Commode – *help to the toilet or commode*

Tool #8: Raised Toilet Seat – *the benefits of a raised toilet seat*

Tool #9: Two-Person Assist – *2 caregivers helping*

Tasks for Daily Living: Strategies for Caregivers

Tool #1: Unassisted Transfer – *standing without help*

- Ideally let the person with dementia do as much as they can for themselves.
- **Helpful things to say:** bring your bum right to the edge of the chair
 - Bring your feet right underneath you.
 - Lean forward.
 - Push up off the arm-rests of the chair if available.

Tool #2: Minimal Assist – *a little bit of help; cueing*

- Most of the time we want people to do things on their own.
- Occasionally they need a little reminder; a ‘minimal assist.’
- Examples: putting our hand on their shoulder, taking them by the hand, pointing in the right direction.
- **Say:** ‘It’s time to go. . . show me how you can stand. . . let’s stand up.’ This cues the person that it is time to stand up and go.

Tool #3: Assist from Low Seated Surface – *helping to stand from a low surface*

- Getting up from a low seated surface, like a chair, a couch, or a toilet requires strong leg muscles.
- To help, suggest the person with dementia to get right to the edge of the seat, and, if possible, spread feet shoulder length apart
- Remind person to lean forward; this helps the body get momentum to stand up.
- Push off from the armrests; if available.
- **Say:** “Nose over toes . . . On the count of three . . . 1-2-3 and stand.”
- Sometimes lifting a person in a sort of hugging position can be helpful. If you feel this is the right option make sure:
 - caregivers knees are bent
 - person with dementia’s arms are around the caregivers waist, and NOT the neck
 - person with dementia has strength to stand
 - person with dementia has strength to maintain grasp around caregiver.

Tool #4: Transfer/Safety Belt

- Caregivers sometimes pull on the person's shoulder to help them get up; usually this is not safe for the person with dementia.
- Helping someone to stand can be challenging if the person with dementia is not the same height or weight as the caregiver.
- **Assistive device:** a transfer belt can give you something to hold on to as the person stands up. This avoids pulling up on the person's shoulder, belt loop or pants.
- If the transfer belt is not helpful, seek professional advice about other possible assistive devices.
- **Say:** "Scootch your bottom forward in the chair . . . I'm going to hold onto the belt. . . on the count of three stand-up."

Tool #5: High Piece of Furniture - *the benefits of standing up from a high seated surface*

- A high seated surface can make it easier to stand up independently.
- If possible avoid dangling feet.
- Long, sturdy arm-rests can be used to push from to stand up.
- When seated, a person's hips should be at least at the same level or slightly higher than their bent knees.
- With this set up the person with dementia may be able to get up by themselves; or with less help.
- **Assistive Device:** blocks under chair legs/ furniture risers
- **Say:** "Scoot to the front of the chair . . . put your hands on the armrests . . . on the count of 3 we're going to stand up . . . 1-2-3."

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Tool #6: Lie to Sit and Sit to Lie - *getting in and out of bed*

- Weakness in the hips and legs can mean the caregiver has to physically lift the person with dementia's legs when moving in and out of bed.
- Caregiver swings legs and person with dementia concentrates on moving their upper body.
- Caregiver needs to have their hands in the right position and know which cues to give to the person.
- Positioning of hands and cues will differ depending on needs of both caregiver and person with dementia. See video for examples.
- **Assistive Device:** a bed assist rail can help person with dementia sit up or lie down.
- **Possible cues lying to sitting** – roll onto side towards edge of bed, push up with elbow closest to mattress and other hand. Say: “bend this knee up, bring this hand over to the railing towards me, and push up with this elbow.”
- **Possible cues sitting to lying down** – sit in the bed in a spot close to the pillow so when you are lying down, your head will come down on the pillow. Say: “bring your bottom right next to this railing. . . Lower yourself down . . . I will help swing your legs in, you worry about getting your upper body on the bed.”
- See video for example.

Tool #7: Assist to Toilet or Commode - *help to the toilet or commode*

- Set up the toilet area so you can reach things easily and safely.
- **Assistive device:** consider a commode beside the bed.
- Place commode against the wall; so it doesn't tip over.
- If needed, talk through the steps with the person with the dementia as you walk from bed to toilet; pointing them in the right direction.
- **You can say:** “Nose over toes to stand up.”
- **At toilet/commode say:** “. . . hold here on the grab bar or armrests, feel the toilet on the back of your legs, sit down.”

Tool #8: Raised Toilet Seat - *the benefits of a raised toilet seat*

- **Assistive device:** Raised toilet seat with or without armrests.
- Will help the person with dementia get on and off the toilet because it is higher, especially if the person is tall.
- Armrests provide a sturdy surface to push from to stand up.
- Armrests may also act as a visual cue to the location of the toilet seat and where to sit.

Final Tool #9: Two-Person Assist – 2 caregivers helping

- Lots of steps with 2 people helping.
- Process will be different depending in many factors.
- Key is having both caregivers communicate roles before the move.
- Decide who will lead the steps. Having two people giving directions at the same time can be confusing.
- Getting the person with dementia to complete the task can be difficult.
- Can take one to two tries before moving them is complete.
- **Possible steps:** One caregiver might bring over the wheelchair and swing out legs rests to avoid tripping hazard. Caregivers choose lead to give instructions and other caregiver to follow instructions.
- **Possible things to say:** Jane and I (caregivers) are going to help you sit up at the edge of the bed. . . . Jane, you are going to help her lift her legs up. And Barb (person with dementia), you're going to roll to the side of the bed, and then I'm going to help your upper body come up . . . 1-2-3 . . . there we are."
- See Tool #3 for suggestions to help lift with a kind of hugging position.

Additional Resources

- Communication - Alzheimer Society of Canada
Personal Care - Alzheimer Society of Canada
- Personal Care - When Toileting Becomes a Challenge: Tips & Strategies - Alzheimer Society of Canada
- Assistive Aids – Mobility Guide - Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia
- Tasks of Daily Living: Strategies for Caregivers
- Video - *Tasks for Daily Living: Strategies for Caregivers*

For more information, please visit the Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia's website www.alzheimer.ca/ns or call us at 1-800-611-6345.

There is information. There is help. You are not alone.

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