

A guide to  
dementia support.

**JAPARA**



## What is dementia?

“Dementia describes a collection of symptoms that are caused by disorders affecting the brain. It is not one specific disease... Dementia affects thinking, behaviour and the ability to perform everyday tasks. Brain function is affected enough to interfere with the person’s normal social or working life.”

Dementia Australia

Dementia is an umbrella term to cover a number of specific diseases. From the 100 different types of dementia, the most common are Alzheimer’s disease, vascular dementia and dementia with Lewy bodies.

Approximately 1,300 people develop dementia in Australia every week. According to Dementia Australia, there are around 425,000 Australians currently living with dementia, and almost 300,000 people involved in their care.



## Symptoms of dementia

There is no standard dementia experience – everyone’s journey with dementia is different. The most common symptoms of dementia are:

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Progressive and frequent memory loss

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Confusion

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Personality and behaviour change

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Apathy and withdrawal

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Loss of ability to perform everyday tasks

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Changes in language function

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The onset of these symptoms can vary from person to person. Some will start with memory loss, others with personality change, and some will undergo language changes where they cannot find the right words.

## Supporting someone living with dementia

At Japara, we believe quality of life is strongly associated with choice. That’s why we look beyond the disease to get to know the individual and what makes them thrive.

People living with dementia should have choice. Maintaining a sense of home, and the freedoms of home, is important for helping someone stay orientated and independent. As much as possible, we replicate the life a person enjoyed before the onset of dementia, nurturing feelings of comfort and familiarity with their surroundings.



It is important to remember that dementia symptoms are as unique as the individual.

What motivates a person to get out of bed in the morning does not change with dementia. It’s essential to fully nurture hobbies, interests, passions, opinions and personal relationships, regardless of any decline in their cognitive abilities.

A person living with dementia may have cognitive impairment but they remain unique as their own person, which means their interests and what they value need to be respected to ensure they keep living life to its fullest.

Learning that a loved one has dementia can be a difficult time for everyone involved. But there are some simple things you can do to help adjust and make life a little easier:

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Promote personal choice and freedom wherever possible

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Provide an environment that is easy to navigate

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Focus on the abilities of the person – what they are good at, rather than what they cannot do anymore

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Communicate in clear, simple terms and use props or visual cues to help convey your message

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Go along with the person’s reality of the world and avoid directly conflicting their interpretations

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Provide sensory experiences that stimulate and promote quality of life – taste, touch, smell, hearing and visual experiences

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## What to look for in an aged care home

We believe a home should be a home – not a clinical facility or a hospital. If a home is not 'home-like' then it will only detract from a person's quality of life and make the dementia journey more difficult than it needs to be.

Think to yourself:

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### How much does it look, feel, smell and operate like a typical home?

If you do not feel at home, it's likely your loved one will feel the same as you.

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### Do the residents have a say in running the home?

They should, if that's important to them, because it is their home.

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### Is there plenty to do, such as activities or taking on responsibilities?

Feeling useful, being productive and having something to do gives life meaning for everyone.

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### Is the home open and integrated with the community?

A good home is one in which it is hard to tell if someone is a resident or a visitor. People with dementia should not feel like prisoners.

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### Does the home understand the unique requirements of dementia?

Dementia is a changing condition, which means a home should have the facilities and staff with knowledge in place to adapt.



## The Japara approach to dementia support – living life as usual in home-like environments

Life doesn't stop when dementia starts. This simple philosophy sits at the heart of our approach to dementia care.

At Japara, we believe in focusing on ability rather than disability. We never forget that we're caring for people, and everything about a person is important – from the emotional and spiritual through to their physical wellbeing.

No person living with dementia is the same. The onset of dementia may alter the personality but it does not erase the person. We go to great lengths to bring dignity and joy to someone living with dementia in ways that are exclusive to them, and not dictated by us.

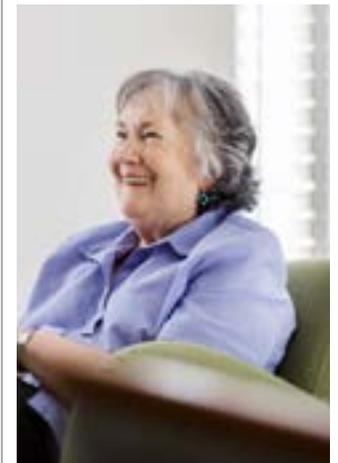
We actively create the very best quality of life and freedoms for our residents, including being part of the wider community. That means making sure all Japara homes are dementia-friendly. In fact, we have Dementia Champions in each one of our homes.

Our Dementia Champions have professional knowledge, as well as an interest and passion for the highest level of dementia support. They are the go-to contact in providing support and advice to other staff members, and identifying opportunities to further improve the quality of life for residents living with dementia. Some of our residences also have specialist dementia spaces for continuation of care and behavioural support as an individual's condition changes along with their needs.

As with every part of Japara, our understanding and our approach to caring for people with dementia is all about respect.

"When someone comes into our homes, giving them a community environment and respecting their life, and doing the utmost we can do to provide them with the best care, is really important to us."

Andrew Sudholz  
Founder and CEO, Japara



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japara.com.au  
or call 1800 52 72 72

## A pioneer in dementia support

As a leader in residential support for people living with dementia, we're proud to be setting new standards in dementia care. Ben Gatehouse, Dementia Strategist at Japara, talks about the Japara difference when it comes to supporting people living with dementia.

### What makes Japara special?

Our point of difference is our 'home-like' living – our philosophy of living life as usual. When a resident or member of the community moves into one of our homes, we do everything to ensure that move is as smooth as possible for the person. Their lifestyle – their choices, their way of life – continues as usual.

### How would you define your wellness approach?

Wellness, in all its forms, is very important to us. It might be physical wellness, it might be mental wellness, it might be emotional wellness or it might be spiritual wellness. We want all of our homes to offer that opportunity for all residents in every way.

### What are some examples of wellness at Japara?

We have physical workout spaces but we also have brain gyms where people can go and exercise their brain to ensure their cognition is as sharp as possible. Wellness for someone could also be going into a sensory room to meditate, or doing Tai Chi or Pilates for physical and mental wellbeing. So we make sure we offer places of wellness that support people holistically, as well as their independence.



Ben Gatehouse  
Dementia Strategist, Japara

“What many people forget about dementia is that those living with the disease still have feelings. They still deserve the utmost respect and dignity, and that’s what we provide.”

### What does wellness mean when it comes to dementia support?

We focus on relationships, because sustaining and improving personal relationships is really important. We work hard at helping our homes become places where family members of all generations want to visit and actually enjoy time with loved ones.

### Does technology play a role in wellness at Japara?

Absolutely. We use technology to help our residents stay connected to family and friends. A good example of that is the use of tablets for video calls. For most people, quality of life has something to do with the quality of their relationships, so we're really keen to use technology to help our residents stay connected to those people who are most important in their lives.

### What is the most common misconception about dementia?

Many people believe it's a normal part of getting old, but it's not. Most people over the age of 65 do not have dementia. It's a unique disease that the person has no direct control over. The changes in personality and behaviour are not part of their normal personality or behavioural profile – they are influenced by the disease itself.



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“Understanding our residents and what they are good at – and what gives their life meaning, and what is a meaningful, productive day for them – is what we’re trying to understand and then deliver.”

**Are there any other misconceptions?**

Even though there is a lot of talk in the media about red wine, coffee, chocolate, green tea, there is no cure for dementia.

**What should we do if someone with dementia says something that’s incorrect?**

There is never any one-size-fits-all approach but, sometimes, it is better not to correct or contradict the person living with dementia and, instead, support their understanding of the world, of their reality. When someone contradicts you or corrects you, it doesn’t support your self-esteem or feeling of self-worth.

**What advice can you give to family members experiencing this?**

Our advice is to focus on how the person living with dementia is feeling, and provide emotional support and reassurance. Consider the abilities your loved one still has, and support their independence and autonomy as much as possible. There are a range of emotions that our family members are experiencing, and we do our best to support and guide them through this often difficult time.



**Questions?  
We’re here to help.**

We pride ourselves on supporting people living with dementia.



Japara would like to thank all residents, staff and family members involved in creating this brochure.

