

Topic Overview

The following suggestions may help you develop a plan to help a family member who has an ongoing problem with memory, problem solving, judgment, or the ability to handle daily tasks. These suggestions are basic and do not include all the information you will need to care for your family member. Your doctor may have other suggestions to add to your plan.

- Establish a simple daily routine.
 - Set regular times for meals, baths, hobbies and a limited number of activities.
 - Warn the person about upcoming changes in the schedule. People with memory problems don't adjust well to sudden changes in their routine.
- Structure the environment to improve memory.
 - Use calendars, clocks and bulletin boards with pictures of the season, month and upcoming holidays.
 - Label objects.
 - Use lists, notes and other helpful devices as reminders.
 - Write daily activities on a calendar or daily planner and keep it in a place where it can be seen easily.
- Give short instructions. A person with memory problems may be able to remember only small amounts of information at a time.
 - Break tasks and instructions into clear, simple steps — one at a time.
 - Use short, simple, familiar words and sentences.
 - Provide written as well as verbal instructions whenever possible.
- Teach a task in the setting, or a similar setting, where the person will need to do the task. A person with memory problems may have trouble applying what has been learned in one setting to other settings.
- Create a safe environment.
 - Lock all poisons and medicines and store them in child-proof containers out of reach.
 - Use a medicine box with a separate compartment or section for each day of the week. This will help the person remember when to take his or her medicines.
 - Review all medicines and dosages with a doctor or pharmacist. Many medications can cause confusion.
 - Put bells on doors and provide an identification bracelet for a person who might wander outside and become lost.

- Make your home safe from falls.
- Avoid or reduce stress, which may make symptoms worse.
 - Maintain eye contact and use touch to reassure the person and show that you are listening.
 - Allow the person as many choices in daily activities as you can. Allow them to select such things as clothing, activities and foods.
 - Provide regular stimulation of the senses through touching, singing, exercising and hugging. Touch may be better understood than words. Holding hands or giving hugs may get through when nothing else can.
 - Ignore behavior that is disruptive or disturbing. Try to interest the person in another activity.
 - Avoid arguing with the person about things that don't really matter. Just change the subject.

Current as of: September 23, 2018

Author: [Healthwise Staff](http://www.healthwise.org) (www.healthwise.org)

Medical Review: William H. Bland, Jr., MD, FACEP — Emergency Medicine & Anne C. Poinier, MD — Internal Medicine & Adam Husney, MD — Family Medicine & Kathleen Romito, MD — Family Medicine & David Messenger, BSc, MD, FRCPC, FCCP — Emergency Medicine, Critical Care Medicine