

Dr. Vera's
DEMENTIA ACTION MANUALS

stop
the



~~chaos!~~

and find the calm

What to Say and Do to Defuse
40 Challenging Dementia Behaviors

DR. FERNANDO VERA, OT

A CAREGIVER'S FIELD MANUAL

STOP THE CHAOS!

What to Say and Do to Defuse 40 Challenging Dementia Behaviors

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StartEmpowering.com

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Important: This manual is for education and support. It does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Every person with dementia is different. Talk with your loved one's doctor about any new, sudden or worsening behavior, and before starting, stopping or changing any medication. In an emergency, call 911.

Names used in the sample phrases are examples.

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You are not failing. The system is failing you.

If you're holding this manual, you've probably had a day that ended in tears. Maybe a bath turned into a shouting match. Maybe your mom didn't recognize you. Maybe you haven't slept through the night in weeks.

I've been there. I'm an occupational therapist and I run a clinic that specializes in dementia care. And I watched my own mother, Virginia, go from healthy and active to living with a rapidly progressing dementia. Even with my training, some days I didn't know what to say.

Here's what I learned, at work and at home: **every behavior is a message.** Pacing might mean pain. Refusing a bath might mean fear. Yelling might mean "I'm lost and I don't understand what's happening."

When you understand the message, you can respond to it. And when you respond to the message instead of the behavior, the chaos gets smaller.

This manual gives you exactly that for 40 of the hardest moments caregivers face: what to say, what to do, what to avoid, and what to change around the house so it happens less.

You don't have to read it cover to cover. Open it to the behavior you're dealing with today. Try one thing. Then try another. Some ideas will work for your family and some won't. That's normal.

Be patient with your loved one. And be just as patient with yourself.

Fernando

Dr. Fernando Vera, OT

Every behavior gets a two-page spread.

The left page gives you the fastest answer: three swaps that show what to say or do instead of the reaction that makes things worse. The right page goes deeper with more phrases, a full Do and Don't list, home changes and a tip. Here's what you'll find.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

How the behavior usually shows up, so you know you're on the right page.

✓ THIS

✗ NOT THAT

Three swaps: what to **say** or **do** instead of a common reaction, each with a one-line reason it works.

DO

DON'T

The full list of actions that help, and the ones that make things worse.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Signs that it's time to get medical help instead of handling it at home.

WHY IT HAPPENS

The most common reasons behind it. Knowing the reason often shows you the fix.

SAY THIS

More word-for-word phrases. Say them slowly, warmly and with a calm face.

CHANGE THE SETUP

Simple changes to the home and routine. As an OT, this is where I see the biggest wins.

Dr. Vera's tip

One practical trick from the clinic and from caring for my own mother.

Three rules that apply to every page

1. You can't win an argument with dementia. Don't try.
2. Answer the feeling, not the facts.
3. If it's not working, stop, step away, and try again in 20 minutes.

When in doubt, stay **C.A.L.M.**

You won't always have this manual in your hand. When a behavior starts, walk through these four steps in order. They work for almost every situation in this book.



Check the cause

- Pain, hunger, thirst or a full bladder
- Too hot, too cold, too loud, too bright
- Tired, bored or overwhelmed
- New medication or a possible infection



Adjust yourself

- Slow down and lower your voice
- Approach from the front, at eye level
- Relax your face and hands
- One short sentence at a time



Listen to the feeling

- Name it: 'You seem worried.'
- Agree with the feeling, not the facts
- Stay with them; don't rush to fix it
- Never argue or correct



Move the moment

- Offer a snack, a drink or a walk
- Give their hands a simple task
- Change the room, the music or the lighting
- Try again later if it's not working

Your calm is contagious. So is your stress.

BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

A sudden change is a medical problem until proven otherwise.

When a behavior appears out of nowhere or gets much worse in a day or two, the cause is often physical, not the dementia itself. Sudden confusion (called delirium) needs medical attention.

Common hidden causes

- ✓ Urinary tract infection
- ✓ Pain: teeth, joints, back, skin
- ✓ Constipation
- ✓ Dehydration
- ✓ A new or changed medication
- ✓ Poor sleep
- ✓ Hearing aids or glasses not working
- ✓ Other infections, like pneumonia

Call 911 right away if

- ! Anyone is in immediate danger
- ! They are missing after a short search
- ! A fall with a head injury, or they can't get up
- ! Trouble breathing or chest pain
- ! Face drooping, arm weakness or slurred speech
- ! They swallowed something poisonous

Poison Control: **1-800-222-1222**

You don't have to figure this out alone. The Alzheimer's Association runs a free helpline, open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for caregivers who need support or advice.

1-800-272-3900

part one

Safety Risks



When the danger is real, safety comes first. These pages help you prevent harm without starting a fight.

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Remember C.A.L.M.

Check the cause • **A**adjust yourself • **L**isten to the feeling • **M**ove the moment

01 Wandering or Trying to Leave the House

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Pacing near doors, putting on a coat at odd hours, slipping out while you're busy, or insisting they have somewhere to be.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Wandering usually has a purpose: looking for a bathroom, a person, a job, or 'home.' Boredom, restlessness, pain and too much noise also drive it.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"You look ready to go. Where are we headed?"

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"You can't go anywhere. Sit down."

Why it works: Asking about the plan uncovers the need behind the walking.

DO THIS

Walk with them, then loop back home.

vs

NOT THAT

Block the door or grab their arm.

Why it works: Going along lowers fear. Blocking turns a walk into a fight.

DO THIS

Keep coats, shoes and keys out of sight.

vs

NOT THAT

Leave them by the door as a reminder.

Why it works: What they don't see often doesn't start the urge to leave.

More ways to help on the next page →

01

Wandering or Trying to Leave the House

continued

**say
this***"You look like you're ready to go. Where are we headed?"**"Let's have a quick snack first, then we'll see about it."**"I'd love some company. Will you walk with me to the garden?"***✓ Do**

- ✓ Ask where they're going and listen for the need behind it.
- ✓ Walk with them for a few minutes, then loop back home.
- ✓ Plan a daily walk and active tasks so restless energy has an outlet.
- ✓ Keep a recent photo and a list of places they might head to.
- ✓ If they go missing, search for no more than 15 minutes, then call 911.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Block the door or grab their arm; it turns a walk into a fight.
- ✗ Argue that they have nowhere to go.
- ✗ Leave them alone in the car or in a public place.
- ✗ Rely on memory; they won't remember they were told to stay.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Door chimes or alarms, and locks placed high or low, out of sight.
- Cover door knobs with a cloth or hang a curtain over the door.
- A medical ID bracelet with your phone number and 'memory loss.'

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

New or sudden wandering, especially at night, or wandering along with a fever, falls or new confusion.

Dr. Vera's tip

Keep their shoes, coat and keys out of view. What they don't see often doesn't start the urge to leave.

02 Insisting on Driving

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Asking for the keys, heading to the car, getting angry when told no, or getting lost or having near-misses while driving.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Driving means independence and adulthood. Losing it can feel like losing who they are, so the reaction is often grief dressed up as anger.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"The doctor said no driving for now. I'll take you."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"You're a terrible driver now."

Why it works: Letting the doctor decide protects their pride and your relationship.

DO THIS

Hide the keys and offer rides right away.

vs

NOT THAT

Debate their driving skills.

Why it works: They still get where they want to go, without an argument.

DO THIS

Ask for an OT driving evaluation.

vs

NOT THAT

Wait for a crash or a ticket.

Why it works: A professional test settles the question safely.

More ways to help on the next page →

02

Insisting on Driving

continued

say
this*"The doctor asked us to hold off on driving for now. I'll take you."**"The car's in the shop this week. Where do you need to go? I'll drive."**"I love riding with you. Would you be my navigator today?"*

✓ Do

- ✓ Let the doctor be the 'bad guy.' Ask them to write a no-driving order.
- ✓ Ask for a formal driving evaluation by an occupational therapist.
- ✓ Offer rides quickly so they still get where they want to go.
- ✓ Honor the feeling: 'It's so hard not to drive. I understand.'
- ✓ Line up rides from family, friends or senior transportation.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Wait for a crash or a ticket to act.
- ✗ Debate their driving skills; they'll feel attacked and dig in.
- ✗ Leave keys where they can find them.
- ✗ Let them drive 'just around the block.'

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Hide the keys or swap them for a set that doesn't start the car.
- Ask a mechanic to disable the car, or move it out of sight.
- Check your state's rules for reporting an unsafe driver.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Any near-miss, getting lost while driving, or new dents and scrapes on the car.

Dr. Vera's tip

Replace the car with something to look forward to: a weekly outing on a set day, with them in the front seat.

03

Falls and Unsafe Climbing or Standing

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Standing up too fast, climbing on chairs to reach things, walking without their walker, or getting up alone at night.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia affects balance, depth perception and judgment. They may forget they need help, or not see a step or a rug clearly.

✓ THIS**✗ NOT THAT****SAY THIS**

"Wait for me, I want to walk with you."

vs**NOT THAT**

"Don't get up!"

Why it works: An invitation works. A command is forgotten in seconds.

DO THIS

Night lights from bed to bathroom.

vs**NOT THAT**

A dark hallway at night.

Why it works: Most falls happen on the way to the bathroom in the dark.

DO THIS

Non-slip, closed-back shoes.

vs**NOT THAT**

Socks or loose slippers.

Why it works: Good grip is the cheapest fall prevention there is.

More ways to help on the next page →

03

Falls and Unsafe Climbing or Standing

continued

say
this*"Wait for me, I want to walk with you."**"Let me hold this for you while you stand up."**"Here's your walker. Let's go together."*

✓ Do

- ✓ Keep a daily routine for bathroom trips, meals and rest so they aren't rushing.
- ✓ Put what they reach for often at waist-to-shoulder height.
- ✓ Use non-slip, closed-back shoes; no socks or loose slippers.
- ✓ Encourage daily movement to keep legs strong.
- ✓ Ask for a physical or occupational therapy home safety visit.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Say 'don't get up'; they'll forget and try anyway.
- ✗ Leave clutter, cords or loose rugs on walkways.
- ✗ Rush them from sitting to standing.
- ✗ Try to catch a heavy fall alone. Guide them down instead.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Night lights from bed to bathroom.
- Grab bars by the toilet and shower, and a raised toilet seat.
- Colored tape on step edges so they stand out.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Any fall, especially with a head hit, new pain, or a sudden increase in falls. Also ask for a medication review.

Dr. Vera's tip

Stand up the slow way: scoot forward, feet back, nose over toes, then stand. Count it out together.

04

Leaving the Stove, Water or Appliances On

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Burned pots, a running faucet, a hot iron left on, or the smell of gas.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Short-term memory loss means the task gets forgotten halfway through. The habit of cooking stays long after the ability to do it safely.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

"Let's cook together. You stir, I'll watch the heat."

vs**✗ NOT THAT****NOT THAT**

"You can't cook anymore."

Why it works: A safe role keeps their pride and keeps you in control.

DO THIS

An automatic stove shut-off or removed knobs.

vs**NOT THAT**

Trusting them to remember.

Why it works: Memory can't be trained back. The stove can be made safe.

DO THIS

Set the water heater to 120°F.

vs**NOT THAT**

Leave it at the factory setting.

Why it works: Lower water temperature prevents scalding burns.

More ways to help on the next page →

04

Leaving the Stove, Water or Appliances On

continued

say
this

"That smells great! Let's cook together. You stir, I'll watch the heat."

"Can you help me set the table while I finish this?"

"I'll turn this off so it doesn't burn. Thanks for starting it."

✓ Do

- ✓ Give them a safe role in the kitchen: washing, stirring, setting the table.
- ✓ Cook together instead of taking the kitchen away completely.
- ✓ Serve ready meals and snacks they can reach without cooking.
- ✓ Check the stove and faucets each time you leave a room.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Scold them over a burned pot.
- ✗ Leave them alone with the stove on.
- ✗ Assume they understand safety labels or warnings anymore.
- ✗ Leave space heaters or irons plugged in.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- An automatic stove shut-off device, or remove the knobs.
- Set the water heater to 120°F to prevent scalding.
- Working smoke and gas detectors; unplug small appliances.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Any burn, or if they're trying to cook at night.

Dr. Vera's tip

Pull the stove's fuse or shut-off switch when you leave the kitchen. It's the simplest fix and costs nothing.

05 Eating or Drinking Things That Aren't Food

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Chewing on soap, plants or paper; drinking cleaning liquids; putting small objects in their mouth.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Later stages can bring trouble recognizing objects. Hunger, thirst, boredom and changes in taste can all play a part.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"Let's trade. Here's something tastier."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"Spit that out right now!"

Why it works: A swap gets the item back without a struggle.

DO THIS

Lock up cleaners, batteries and pills.

vs

NOT THAT

Store them under the sink.

Why it works: If it's in reach, it can end up in their mouth.

DO THIS

Keep safe snacks in plain view.

vs

NOT THAT

Only serve food at mealtimes.

Why it works: Hunger is often what drives them to eat non-food items.

More ways to help on the next page →

05 Eating or Drinking Things That Aren't Food*continued***say
this***"Let's trade. Here's something tastier."**"That's not for eating. How about some crackers?"**"You must be hungry. Let's get a snack."***✓ Do**

- ✓ Swap the item for a safe snack; don't pull it away.
- ✓ Offer regular snacks and drinks so hunger isn't the driver.
- ✓ Keep finger foods in easy view.
- ✓ Save Poison Control's number: 1-800-222-1222.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Pry objects from their mouth; you could get bitten.
- ✗ Leave cleaners, medications or batteries in reach.
- ✗ Keep fake fruit, decorative soaps or small magnets around.
- ✗ Punish or shame them.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Lock up cleaning products, chemicals and all medications.
- Remove toxic houseplants.
- Store dish soap and shampoo in closed cabinets.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Right away if they swallow something harmful, or if they're choking or coughing while eating.

Dr. Vera's tip

If it looks like candy, it gets eaten. Walk through the house and remove anything small, colorful and edible-looking.

06 Getting Lost in Familiar Places

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Can't find the bathroom at home, confused in their own neighborhood, or lost in a store they've visited for years.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia affects the brain's 'map.' Familiar places can suddenly look new, which is frightening.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"I'm right here. Let's find it together."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"You've been here a hundred times!"

Why it works: Your calm is their compass. Quizzing adds fear.

DO THIS

Picture signs on bathroom and bedroom doors.

vs

NOT THAT

Expect them to remember the layout.

Why it works: Labels do the remembering for them.

DO THIS

Hold hands in stores and crowds.

vs

NOT THAT

Split up to save time.

Why it works: Getting separated in public is how many people go missing.

More ways to help on the next page →

06

Getting Lost in Familiar Places

continued

say
this*"I know this can be confusing. I'm right here with you."**"The bathroom is right this way. Follow me."**"We're safe. Let's find our way together."*

✓ Do

- ✓ Stay close in public places and hold hands in crowds.
- ✓ Keep outings short, at quiet times of day.
- ✓ Label rooms with words and pictures.
- ✓ Keep a card in their pocket with your name and phone number.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Quiz them: 'You've been here a hundred times!'
- ✗ Split up in stores or parking lots.
- ✗ Rearrange furniture or move their things.
- ✗ Show frustration; your calm is their compass.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Picture signs on bathroom, bedroom and kitchen doors.
- Leave the bathroom door open and the light on.
- A GPS tracker in their shoe, watch or pocket.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If getting lost comes on suddenly or quickly gets worse.

Dr. Vera's tip

A bright, contrasting toilet seat and a lit hallway can end most nighttime 'Where's the bathroom?' moments.

07 Unsafe Use of Tools, Knives or Medications

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Using sharp knives carelessly, taking extra pills, mixing up medications, or using power tools unsafely.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Judgment and sequencing fade before the urge to be useful does. Old skills feel familiar even when they're no longer safe.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"Could you help me with this instead? I need your hands."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"You'll hurt yourself with that."

Why it works: Offering a safe job redirects the urge to be useful.

DO THIS

Hand them one dose at a time.

vs

NOT THAT

Let them manage their own pills.

Why it works: Double doses and missed doses are common and dangerous.

DO THIS

Lock up knives, tools and firearms.

vs

NOT THAT

Hide them in the usual drawer.

Why it works: Old habits know exactly where things used to be.

More ways to help on the next page →

07

Unsafe Use of Tools, Knives or Medications

continued

**say
this***"Could you help me with this instead? I need your hands."**"I'll handle the pills today so you can relax."**"Let's do this project together."***✓ Do**

- ✓ Give safe jobs that use the same skills: sanding, sorting nuts and bolts, folding.
- ✓ Take over medication management fully.
- ✓ Use a locked pill organizer and hand them one dose at a time.
- ✓ Supervise any tool use.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Leave pill bottles out 'just for today.'
- ✗ Let them manage their own medications on trust.
- ✗ Leave knives, guns or power tools in reach.
- ✗ Remove every meaningful task; give them a safe one instead.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Lock up medications, knives, tools and firearms.
- Remove or lock the garage workshop.
- Unplug power tools or remove batteries.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Right away if they may have taken extra medication. Call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 or 911.

Dr. Vera's tip

Make a 'fix-it box' with safe nuts, bolts, locks and keys to sort. Busy hands keep a proud tinkerer engaged.

part two

Care Refusals



Bathing, pills, meals and more. How to get the essentials done without turning care into a battle.

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Remember C.A.L.M.

Check the cause • **A**adjust yourself • **L**isten to the feeling • **M**ove the moment

08 Refusing to Bathe or Shower

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Saying 'I already showered,' getting angry or scared in the bathroom, or pushing you away.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Bathing can feel cold, exposed and frightening. Water may look deep or feel like an attack. Loss of privacy is humiliating.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"Let's freshen up before your visitor comes."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"You need a bath. You smell."

Why it works: A reason they care about beats a reason that shames.

DO THIS

Warm the room and wrap them in a towel.

vs

NOT THAT

Undress them in a cold bathroom.

Why it works: Feeling cold and exposed is the top reason people refuse.

DO THIS

Wash the hair last, or on a different day.

vs

NOT THAT

Start by spraying water on their head.

Why it works: Water on the face and head feels like an attack.

More ways to help on the next page →

08 Refusing to Bathe or Shower

continued

say
this

"Let's freshen up before your visitor comes."

"I warmed up the bathroom and a towel for you."

"Could you help me wash your arms? You do it so well."

✓ Do

- ✓ Choose the time of day they were used to bathing.
- ✓ Warm the room and towels first.
- ✓ Keep them covered with a towel, washing one part at a time.
- ✓ Hand them the washcloth so they do what they can.
- ✓ Try a sponge bath if a shower is too much. Two or three baths a week can be enough.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Use the words 'bath' or 'shower' if they trigger a fight.
- ✗ Spray water on their face or head first.
- ✗ Force it. Stop, try again in 20 minutes.
- ✗ Argue that they're dirty.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- A shower chair and a handheld shower head.
- Grab bars and a non-slip mat.
- Soft lighting and calm music.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If they show pain when touched, or refusal suddenly gets much worse.

Dr. Vera's tip

Start with the feet and wash the hair last, or on a different day. Water on the head is the top bathing trigger.

09 Refusing Medications

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Spitting out pills, keeping them in their mouth, saying 'I don't need that,' or accusing you of poisoning them.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Pills can be hard to swallow, taste bad, or look unfamiliar. Paranoia and lost understanding of why they need them also play a role.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"The doctor asked me to give you this. It's for your heart."

VS

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"Take your pills. Now."

Why it works: Borrowing the doctor's authority avoids a power struggle.

DO THIS

Try again in 15 to 20 minutes.

VS

NOT THAT

Keep pushing until they give in.

Why it works: Moods change fast. A short break often ends the refusal.

DO THIS

Ask the pharmacist about liquids or patches.

VS

NOT THAT

Crush pills into food on your own.

Why it works: Some pills are dangerous when crushed.

More ways to help on the next page →

09

Refusing Medications

continued

say
this*"The doctor asked me to give you this. It's for your heart."**"Let's take this with some juice."**"I'll take my vitamin and you take yours."*

✓ Do

- ✓ Give one pill at a time with a favorite drink.
- ✓ Try again in 15 to 20 minutes if they refuse.
- ✓ Ask the pharmacist about liquid, patch or smaller forms.
- ✓ Ask the doctor which medications could be stopped.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Crush pills or mix them into food without asking the pharmacist. Some can't be crushed.
- ✗ Hide medication in food without discussing it with the doctor.
- ✗ Argue about why they need it.
- ✗ Force pills into their mouth.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Give medications at the same time and place each day.
- Store them out of sight between doses.
- Take them together with a snack as a 'break' routine.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If they keep refusing an essential medication, or show trouble swallowing.

Dr. Vera's tip

Ask the doctor to cut the list. Fewer pills mean fewer battles, and many older adults take medications they no longer need.

10 Refusing to Eat or Drink

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Pushing plates away, taking only a few bites, forgetting to eat, or refusing water.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Taste and smell change. Mouth pain, depression, constipation, too many choices, or not recognizing food can all be causes.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"Would you keep me company while I eat?"

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"You have to eat something!"

Why it works: People with dementia often copy what they see you do.

DO THIS

One or two foods on a solid-colored plate.

vs

NOT THAT

A full, busy plate with many utensils.

Why it works: Fewer choices and strong contrast make food easier to see and start.

DO THIS

Finger foods and drinks every hour or two.

vs

NOT THAT

Three big meals a day.

Why it works: Small, frequent bites add up without a fight.

More ways to help on the next page →

10 Refusing to Eat or Drink

continued

say
this

"Would you keep me company while I eat?"

"Try a bite of this and tell me what you think."

"Here's your favorite."

✓ Do

- ✓ Eat together. They'll often copy what you do.
- ✓ Serve small portions, one or two foods at a time.
- ✓ Offer finger foods and drinks every hour or two.
- ✓ Try sweeter or saltier foods; taste often fades.
- ✓ Check the mouth for sores, loose dentures or tooth pain.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Put a full plate and several utensils in front of them.
- ✗ Force-feed or rush them.
- ✗ Use patterned plates that hide the food.
- ✗ Fight over table manners.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Solid, contrasting plates (red or blue) so food stands out.
- A quiet table with no TV.
- Water, juice and fruit in plain view around the house.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Weight loss, several days of poor eating, signs of dehydration (dark urine, dry mouth, new confusion), or coughing when swallowing.

Dr. Vera's tip

Red plates have helped people with advanced dementia eat more. The color makes the food easier to see.



Refusing to Change Clothes or Wearing the Same Outfit for Days

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Sleeping in daytime clothes, refusing to take off a favorite shirt, or layering many items.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dressing takes many steps. Too many choices overwhelm them, and familiar clothes feel safe.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"The blue or the red one today?"

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"Go pick something to wear."

Why it works: Two choices feel in control. A full closet is overwhelming.

DO THIS

Buy three of the favorite outfit.

vs

NOT THAT

Fight over wearing it again.

Why it works: One is always clean, and there's nothing to argue about.

DO THIS

Lay clothes out in order, one step at a time.

vs

NOT THAT

Give all the instructions at once.

Why it works: One step at a time keeps dressing doable.

More ways to help on the next page →

11

Refusing to Change Clothes or Wearing the Same Outfit for Days

continued

say
this

"This one's going in the wash. Here's a fresh one."

"The blue or the red today?"

"You look great in this. Let's put it on."

✓ Do

- ✓ Offer two choices, not a full closet.
- ✓ Lay clothes out in the order they go on.
- ✓ Buy several copies of the favorite outfit.
- ✓ Swap dirty clothes out while they bathe or sleep.
- ✓ Give one step at a time: 'Arm here.'

✗ Don't

- ✗ Argue about how long they've worn it.
- ✗ Rush them.
- ✗ Leave dirty clothes where they'll put them back on.
- ✗ Criticize their choices.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Clear out the closet so only a few outfits are visible.
- Elastic waists, slip-on shoes, Velcro and front openings.
- A chair to sit on while dressing.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If dressing suddenly becomes much harder or painful.

Dr. Vera's tip

Duplicates are your secret weapon. Three identical sweaters mean one is always clean.

12

Refusing Help With Toileting or Incontinence Care

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Hiding soiled clothes, refusing to be changed, getting angry or scared during care, or accidents in odd places.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Embarrassment, fear, and not recognizing the signals or finding the bathroom in time.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

"Let's get you comfortable and fresh."

vs**✗ NOT THAT****NOT THAT**

"You had an accident again."

Why it works: Dignity keeps them cooperating. Shame makes them hide it.

DO THIS

Bathroom trips every two to three hours.

vs**NOT THAT**

Wait for them to ask.

Why it works: They may not recognize the signal in time.

DO THIS

Cut drinks two hours before bed.

vs**NOT THAT**

Cut drinks all day.

Why it works: Dehydration causes infections and more confusion.

More ways to help on the next page →

12

Refusing Help With Toileting or Incontinence Care

continued

say
this

"Let's get you comfortable and fresh."

"Accidents happen to everyone. No big deal."

"I'll hand you the cloth. You're in charge."

✓ Do

- ✓ Take them to the bathroom every two to three hours, and after meals.
- ✓ Watch for signs: restlessness, pulling at clothes, pacing.
- ✓ Keep a matter-of-fact, calm tone.
- ✓ Protect their privacy; cover them with a towel.
- ✓ Use pull-up underwear that looks like regular underwear.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Scold, shame or say 'You had an accident again.'
- ✗ Call it 'diapers.'
- ✗ Cut back on drinks all day; this causes infections.
- ✗ Talk about it in front of others.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- A clear, lit path to the bathroom, and a sign on the door.
- A contrasting toilet seat.
- A bedside commode at night.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Sudden incontinence, burning, fever, or new confusion. It could be a urinary tract infection.

Dr. Vera's tip

*Cut down on drinks two hours before bed, not during the day.
Dehydration makes confusion worse.*

13

Refusing to Go to Doctor Appointments

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Refusing to get in the car, 'I'm not sick!', or anger when the visit comes up.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Doctors mean tests and bad news. Unfamiliar places are stressful, and they may not believe anything is wrong.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

"Let's go out for lunch and stop for a quick check."

vs**✗ NOT THAT****NOT THAT**

"You have a doctor's appointment Tuesday."

Why it works: Less warning means less time to worry and dig in.

DO THIS

Book the first appointment of the day.

vs**NOT THAT**

Book late afternoon.

Why it works: Mornings are usually the calmest, clearest time.

DO THIS

Send the doctor a note before the visit.

vs**NOT THAT**

List every problem out loud in the exam room.

Why it works: Your concerns get heard without embarrassing them.

More ways to help on the next page →

13

Refusing to Go to Doctor Appointments

continued

say
this*"We're going out for lunch, and we'll stop by for a quick check."**"It's just your yearly checkup, like always."**"I need to go and I'd like your company."*

✓ Do

- ✓ Tell them only shortly before leaving; too early builds worry.
- ✓ Book the first appointment of the day or after a nap, when they're rested.
- ✓ Tell the office ahead about the dementia and ask for a quiet room.
- ✓ Bring snacks, water and a comfort item.
- ✓ Plan a treat afterward.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Announce the appointment days in advance.
- ✗ Argue about whether they are sick.
- ✗ Discuss them as if they aren't there.
- ✗ Fill the day with other errands.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Ask about telehealth or home visits.
- Bring a written list of concerns so the visit is short.
- Ask for longer appointment slots.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Tell the doctor about refusals. They may suggest home visits or a different plan.

Dr. Vera's tip

Send the doctor a note before the visit about the behaviors you see. You don't have to say it all in front of your loved one.

14 Refusing to Brush Teeth or Groom

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Refusing to brush teeth, comb hair or shave, or pushing your hand away.

WHY IT HAPPENS

These tasks involve many steps and feel intrusive. Mouth pain and sensitive gums make it worse.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"Let's brush together."

VS

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"Go brush your teeth."

Why it works: Doing it side by side lets them copy you.

DO THIS

Put toothpaste on the brush and hand it over.

VS

NOT THAT

Explain all the steps.

Why it works: Starting the task for them gets them past the hardest part.

DO THIS

Try a soft or electric toothbrush.

VS

NOT THAT

Scrub harder when they resist.

Why it works: Sore gums are a common hidden reason for refusal.

More ways to help on the next page →

14 Refusing to Brush Teeth or Groom

continued

say
this

"Let's brush together."

"Here's your toothbrush. Show me how you do it."

"Want to look sharp for the visit today?"

✓ Do

- ✓ Brush side by side so they can copy you.
- ✓ Put toothpaste on the brush and hand it to them.
- ✓ Guide their hand with yours if needed.
- ✓ Break it into steps and praise each one.
- ✓ Try a soft or electric toothbrush.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Force their mouth open.
- ✗ Scold them for bad breath or messy hair.
- ✗ Give all instructions at once.
- ✗ Skip dental visits.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Keep toothbrush and comb in plain view by the sink.
- A stool or chair to sit at the sink.
- An electric razor instead of a blade.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Mouth pain, loose teeth, bleeding gums or bad breath that won't go away. See the dentist too.

Dr. Vera's tip

Do it at the same point each day, like right after breakfast. Routine does the persuading for you.

15

Refusing Outside Caregivers or Adult Day Programs

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

'I don't need a babysitter,' refusing to open the door, or refusing to go to day programs.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Accepting help can feel like losing independence. Strangers are frightening when memory is failing.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"This is my friend Maria. She's helping me out."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"This is your new babysitter."

Why it works: Helping you feels acceptable. Needing help feels like loss.

DO THIS

Short first visits while you're home.

vs

NOT THAT

Leave on the first day.

Why it works: Trust builds slowly with a familiar person nearby.

DO THIS

Call the day program 'the club.'

vs

NOT THAT

Call it 'day care.'

Why it works: Words that sound adult protect their dignity.

More ways to help on the next page →

15

Refusing Outside Caregivers or Adult Day Programs

continued

say
this

"This is my friend Maria. She's here to help me out."

"The club needs volunteers, and they asked for you."

"The doctor wants you to try this for a month."

✓ Do

- ✓ Introduce new help slowly: short visits while you're home.
- ✓ Present the caregiver as your helper or friend.
- ✓ Call day programs 'the club' or 'volunteering.'
- ✓ Stay with the same caregiver whenever possible.
- ✓ Give the program a few weeks before deciding.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Say 'You need help' or 'babysitter.'
- ✗ Leave on the first day without a warm handoff.
- ✗ Give up after one bad visit.
- ✗ Feel guilty. Getting help is part of good care.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Share their life story and likes with the caregiver.
- Start with an activity they enjoy together.
- Keep visits at the same time each week.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Ask for a written recommendation for care. It helps with acceptance.

Dr. Vera's tip

Give the caregiver a 'job' only your loved one can help with, like teaching a recipe. Now they're the helper.

part three

Emotional Distress



Anger, fear, tears and clinging. How to calm the storm and protect yourself while you do it.

In this part

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Remember C.A.L.M.

Check the cause · **A**adjust yourself · **L**isten to the feeling · **M**ove the moment

16

Agitation and Restlessness

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Pacing, fidgeting, repeated movements, pulling at clothes, or a sense that they can't get settled.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Agitation is often a signal: pain, hunger, a full bladder, boredom, too much noise, or being tired.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

"You seem upset. I'm right here."

vs**✗ NOT THAT****NOT THAT**

"Calm down!"

Why it works: Naming the feeling calms. Commands escalate.

DO THIS

Check pain, bathroom, hunger and temperature first.

vs**NOT THAT**

Assume it's just the dementia.

Why it works: Agitation is often a signal of an unmet need.

DO THIS

Give a simple task like folding towels.

vs**NOT THAT**

Leave them with nothing to do.

Why it works: Busy hands settle a restless body.

More ways to help on the next page →

16 Agitation and Restlessness

continued

say
this

"You seem upset. I'm right here."

"Let's take a walk together."

"Could you help me fold these towels?"

✓ Do

- ✓ Check basic needs first: pain, bathroom, hunger, thirst, temperature.
- ✓ Lower your voice and move slowly.
- ✓ Reduce noise: turn off the TV, dim the lights.
- ✓ Give a simple, repetitive task: folding, sorting, sweeping.
- ✓ Play music they loved as young adults.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Raise your voice or argue.
- ✗ Give many instructions at once.
- ✗ Crowd them or hold them in place.
- ✗ Take it personally.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- A calm corner with a comfortable chair.
- A daily routine with activity and rest.
- An activity box with safe items to handle.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Sudden or severe agitation. Ask about pain, infection, constipation or medication side effects.

Dr. Vera's tip

Keep a log of when agitation happens. Patterns reveal triggers: time of day, hunger, visitors or noise.

17

Verbal Aggression: Yelling, Cursing, Insults

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Yelling, cursing, name-calling or cruel comments, often directed at the person closest to them.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia damages the brain's filter. Fear, frustration, pain and confusion come out as angry words.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

"You're right, that's frustrating."

vs**✗ NOT THAT****NOT THAT**

"Don't talk to me like that!"

Why it works: Agreeing with the feeling takes the fuel away.

DO THIS

Lower your voice and give space.

vs**NOT THAT**

Yell back or argue.

Why it works: They mirror your tone, not your words.

DO THIS

Step out for a minute if you need to.

vs**NOT THAT**

Stay and absorb the insults.

Why it works: A short break protects you both.

More ways to help on the next page →

17

Verbal Aggression: Yelling, Cursing, Insults*continued***say
this***"I can see you're upset. I'm listening."**"You're right, that's frustrating."**"Let's take a break and have some tea."***✓ Do**

- ✓ Stay calm and speak softly.
- ✓ Name the feeling: 'You sound angry.'
- ✓ Give them space and time to calm down.
- ✓ Change the activity or the room.
- ✓ Walk away for a moment if you need to.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Yell back or argue.
- ✗ Take the words personally. The disease is talking.
- ✗ Correct them or explain why they're wrong.
- ✗ Punish or threaten.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Lower noise and crowding.
- Notice times and triggers that lead to outbursts.
- Give extra time for tasks so they don't feel rushed.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If outbursts are new, getting worse, or turning physical.

Dr. Vera's tip

Breathe out slowly before responding. Your calm body language is the fastest way to lower their voice.

18

Physical Aggression: Hitting, Pushing, Grabbing

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Hitting, kicking, pushing, grabbing or biting, often during personal care.

WHY IT HAPPENS

They may feel threatened or in pain, or misread your touch as an attack. It's almost always self-defense in their mind.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

**"I'm going to step back.
You're safe."**

vs**✗ NOT THAT****NOT THAT**

"Stop hitting me!"

Why it works: In their mind, they're defending themselves. Show you're not a threat.

DO THIS

**Explain each step before you
touch them.**

vs**NOT THAT**

**Start care from behind without
warning.**

Why it works: Surprise touch feels like an attack.

DO THIS

**Leave the room and call for
help if needed.**

vs**NOT THAT**

Restrain them or hit back.

Why it works: Your safety comes first. Call 911 if anyone is in danger.

More ways to help on the next page →

18

Physical Aggression: Hitting, Pushing, Grabbing *continued***say
this***"I'm going to step back. You're safe."**"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you."**"Let's try again in a little while."***✓ Do**

- ✓ Step back out of reach and give them space.
- ✓ Stay calm and keep your hands visible.
- ✓ Stop the task that triggered it; try later.
- ✓ Explain every step before touching: 'I'm going to wash your arm.'
- ✓ Approach from the front, at eye level.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Hit back, restrain or corner them.
- ✗ Approach from behind.
- ✗ Rush care tasks.
- ✗ Stay in danger. Leave the room and call for help if needed.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Remove objects that could be thrown or used as weapons.
- Keep a clear exit for both of you.
- Have two people for difficult care if possible.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Any physical aggression. Call 911 if anyone is in danger. Ask the doctor about pain and medications.

Dr. Vera's tip

Most hits happen during bathing, dressing and toileting. Slowing down these tasks prevents most aggression.

19 Anxiety and Constant Worry

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Repeated worries, clinging, asking where you are, fear about money or safety, or wringing hands.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Memory loss makes the world feel uncertain. They can't remember reassurance, so the worry keeps coming back.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"You're safe. I took care of it."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"There's nothing to worry about."

Why it works: Reassurance works better than dismissing the worry.

DO THIS

Write it on a card: 'The bills are paid. Love, Ana.'

vs

NOT THAT

Explain the same answer again and again.

Why it works: A note in your handwriting reassures them even when you're not there.

DO THIS

Music, a pet or a hand massage.

vs

NOT THAT

News and upsetting TV.

Why it works: Calm input creates a calm mood.

More ways to help on the next page →

19

Anxiety and Constant Worry*continued***say
this***"You're safe. I'm right here."**"I took care of it. Everything's fine."**"Let's sit together for a bit."***✓ Do**

- ✓ Reassure with a calm voice and gentle touch.
- ✓ Keep a steady daily routine.
- ✓ Write reassurance on a card: 'The bills are paid. Love, Ana.'
- ✓ Use calming activities: music, a pet, hand massage.
- ✓ Limit news and upsetting TV.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Say 'There's nothing to worry about.'
- ✗ Explain with long, logical answers.
- ✗ Show your own stress in front of them.
- ✗ Make big changes without preparing them.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- A calm, predictable home.
- A visible calendar or whiteboard of the day's plan.
- Soft lighting in the evening.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Anxiety that disrupts sleep, eating or daily life. Treatment can help.

Dr. Vera's tip

A written note in your handwriting can calm them again and again, even when you're in another room.

20 Crying Spells or Sudden Sadness

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Crying without clear reason, sudden sadness, or grief over past losses.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia can bring waves of emotion that come on fast. They may be reliving an old loss or sense something is wrong.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"It's okay to feel sad. I'm here."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"Stop crying. There's no reason to be sad."

Why it works: Feelings pass faster when they're allowed.

DO THIS

Sit close and let them cry.

vs

NOT THAT

Rush to fix it or change the subject.

Why it works: Being present is the comfort.

DO THIS

Look at happy photos together afterward.

vs

NOT THAT

Leave them alone while upset.

Why it works: Gentle redirection after comfort lifts the mood.

More ways to help on the next page →

20

Crying Spells or Sudden Sadness*continued***say
this***"I'm here with you."**"It's okay to feel sad."**"Tell me about it."***✓ Do**

- ✓ Sit close and offer a gentle touch if they like it.
- ✓ Let them cry without rushing to fix it.
- ✓ Listen to what they're feeling.
- ✓ Gently shift to a comforting activity after a while.
- ✓ Look at happy photos or play favorite music.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Tell them to stop crying.
- ✗ Say 'There's no reason to be sad.'
- ✗ Leave them alone while upset.
- ✗ Ignore frequent crying.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Photos of happy memories in view.
- A comfort object: blanket, doll or pet.
- Keep the day active and connected.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Frequent crying, or crying with poor sleep, eating or withdrawal. Depression is treatable.

Dr. Vera's tip

You don't need to find the reason. Being present is the answer.

21

Depression and Apathy, Losing Interest in Everything

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Sitting for hours, no interest in hobbies or people, sleeping more, little talking.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia affects the brain's drive and motivation. Depression is also common and treatable.

✓ **THIS**

✗ **NOT THAT**

SAY THIS

"Could you help me with this?"

vs

NOT THAT

"Do you want to do something?"

Why it works: 'Help me' gets a yes. 'Do you want to' gets a no.

DO THIS

Get outside for sun every day.

vs

NOT THAT

TV all day in a dim room.

Why it works: Light and movement fight low mood.

DO THIS

Ask the doctor about depression.

vs

NOT THAT

Assume it's just aging.

Why it works: Depression in dementia is common and treatable.

More ways to help on the next page →

21

Depression and Apathy, Losing Interest in Everything

continued

say
this

"Could you help me with this?"

"Come sit with me in the sun."

"I need your advice on something."

✓ Do

- ✓ Start activities for them; don't ask 'Do you want to...!'
- ✓ Keep tasks simple and short.
- ✓ Get outside daily for light and fresh air.
- ✓ Use music, pets, children and old hobbies.
- ✓ Celebrate small wins.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Call them lazy.
- ✗ Leave them in front of the TV all day.
- ✗ Offer complex or childish activities.
- ✗ Give up. Small moments of engagement matter.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Put hobby items in view: yarn, garden tools, cards.
- A daily schedule with at least one meaningful task.
- A chair near a sunny window.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Signs of depression: loss of appetite, sleep changes, hopelessness. Ask about treatment.

Dr. Vera's tip

'Help me' works far better than 'Do you want to.' People with dementia still want to feel useful.



Shadowing: Following the Caregiver Everywhere

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Following you from room to room, waiting outside the bathroom, panicking when you step away.

WHY IT HAPPENS

You're their anchor in a confusing world. When you're out of sight, they may feel you've disappeared.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"I'm going to the kitchen. I'll be right back."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

Sneaking away without a word.

Why it works: Telling them where you're going builds trust.

DO THIS

Give them a task while you step away.

vs

NOT THAT

Snap at them for following you.

Why it works: A job makes the wait feel shorter.

DO THIS

Use a timer: 'When it rings, I'll be back.'

vs

NOT THAT

Stay gone with no signal.

Why it works: A clear signal replaces the memory they can't hold.

More ways to help on the next page →

22

Shadowing: Following the Caregiver Everywhere*continued***say
this***"I'm going to the kitchen. I'll be right back."**"Can you hold this for me until I come back?"**"Here's a note: I'm in the garden. Back at 3."***✓ Do**

- ✓ Give them a simple task while you step away.
- ✓ Tell them where you're going every time.
- ✓ Use a timer: 'When it rings, I'll be back.'
- ✓ Let another trusted person sit with them.
- ✓ Take real breaks. You need them.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Sneak away; it increases fear.
- ✗ Get frustrated or snap at them.
- ✗ Lock yourself away for long periods.
- ✗ Ignore your own need for rest.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- A baby monitor so you can hear them from another room.
- A comfortable spot near where you usually are.
- Familiar music or a video playing when you step away.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If clinging suddenly gets much worse, or comes with fear or confusion.

Dr. Vera's tip

*Record a short video or voice message of you saying 'I'll be right back.'
Play it when you need a few minutes.*

23

Fear of Being Left Alone

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Panic or crying when you leave, calling for you over and over, refusing to let you go.

WHY IT HAPPENS

They can't hold onto the memory that you'll return. Every goodbye may feel permanent.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

"I love you. See you after lunch."

vs**✗ NOT THAT****NOT THAT**

Long, emotional goodbyes.

Why it works: Short and cheerful is easier on everyone.

DO THIS

Leave while they're busy with something.

vs**NOT THAT**

Leave during a quiet moment.

Why it works: Engagement softens the goodbye.

DO THIS

A note or clock showing when you'll return.

vs**NOT THAT**

Saying 'I'll be back soon.'

Why it works: Something they can see works better than words they'll forget.

More ways to help on the next page →

23

Fear of Being Left Alone

continued

say
this

"I'll be back after lunch."

"Maria is here to keep you company."

"I love you. See you soon."

✓ Do

- ✓ Keep goodbyes short and cheerful.
- ✓ Leave when they're engaged with an activity.
- ✓ Have someone familiar stay with them.
- ✓ Leave a note or photo of you that says when you'll return.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Sneak out without saying goodbye.
- ✗ Stay longer to calm them; it makes it harder.
- ✗ Show guilt or worry as you leave.
- ✗ Leave them truly alone if they can't be safe.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- A clock or whiteboard showing when you'll return.
- A familiar companion or caregiver.
- A comfort item you leave behind, like a scarf.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If fear is severe or constant. Ask about treatment for anxiety.

Dr. Vera's tip

Start with short absences, like 10 minutes, and build up. Each good return builds trust.

part four

Confusion and Changed Reality



When their world doesn't match yours. How to meet them where they are instead of correcting them.

In this part

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-

Remember C.A.L.M.

Check the cause • **A**adjust yourself • **L**isten to the feeling • **M**ove the moment

24

Asking the Same Question Over and Over

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

'What time is it?', 'When are we going?', or 'Where's John?' asked every few minutes.

WHY IT HAPPENS

They don't remember asking or hearing the answer. Often the question hides a worry.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

"We're going at 2. It's written right here."

vs**✗ NOT THAT****NOT THAT**

"I already told you!"

Why it works: Each time feels like the first time to them.

DO THIS

Write answers on a whiteboard.

vs**NOT THAT**

Answer out loud every time.

Why it works: The board answers for you, again and again.

DO THIS

Share plans shortly before they happen.

vs**NOT THAT**

Announce plans days ahead.

Why it works: Less time to wait means fewer repeated questions.

More ways to help on the next page →

24

Asking the Same Question Over and Over

continued

say
this*"We're going at 2. It's written right here."**"You're wondering about lunch. Let's go make it."**"John's at work. He'll call tonight."*

✓ Do

- ✓ Answer calmly, as if it's the first time.
- ✓ Look for the feeling behind the question: worry, boredom, a need.
- ✓ Write the answer on a whiteboard or card.
- ✓ Redirect to an activity.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Say 'I already told you!'
- ✗ Sigh, roll your eyes, or show irritation.
- ✗ Announce events too far in advance.
- ✗ Ignore them.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- A large whiteboard or calendar with the day's plan.
- A clock that shows the day and date.
- Keep routines the same each day.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If repeating suddenly increases, or comes with new confusion.

Dr. Vera's tip

Don't tell them about appointments until shortly before. Less time to wait means fewer repeated questions.

25

"I Want to Go Home" (Even When They Are Home)

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Packing bags, asking to go home, trying to leave, or saying 'This isn't my house.'

WHY IT HAPPENS

'Home' often means a feeling: safety, comfort, childhood. It's common in the late afternoon.

✓ **THIS**

✗ **NOT THAT**

SAY THIS

"Tell me about your home."

VS

NOT THAT

"You ARE home!"

Why it works: 'Home' is often a feeling of safety. Answer the feeling.

DO THIS

Look at old photos together.

VS

NOT THAT

Show them proof they live here.

Why it works: Comfort works. Proof doesn't.

DO THIS

Take a short walk and 'come home.'

VS

NOT THAT

Stop them at the door.

Why it works: The walk meets the need, and the return feels like arriving.

More ways to help on the next page →

25

"I Want to Go Home" (Even When They Are Home)

continued

**say
this***"Tell me about your home."**"You miss home. What's your favorite thing about it?"**"We'll go after dinner. Let's eat first."***✓ Do**

- ✓ Ask about home and listen to their memories.
- ✓ Comfort the feeling: 'You feel lost. I'm here.'
- ✓ Redirect to a familiar activity or snack.
- ✓ Look at old photos together.
- ✓ Take a short walk or drive and 'return home.'

✗ Don't

- ✗ Say 'You are home!'
- ✗ Argue or show proof.
- ✗ Laugh or brush it off.
- ✗ Physically stop them without trying to calm first.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Familiar items and photos from their past around the home.
- Calm, warm lighting in the afternoon.
- An afternoon routine with activity.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If it comes on suddenly or with new confusion or agitation.

Dr. Vera's tip

The question isn't about an address. Answer the feeling, and the request often fades.

26

Asking for a Parent or Spouse Who Has Died

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

'Where's my mother?', 'When is Joe coming home?', waiting for someone who has passed away.

WHY IT HAPPENS

They may be living in an earlier time in their life. Each reminder of the death can feel like new grief.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

"You're thinking about your mom. Tell me about her."

vs**NOT THAT**

"Your mother died years ago."

Why it works: Hearing it again can feel like brand-new grief.

DO THIS

Talk about good memories of that person.

vs**NOT THAT**

Argue about the facts.

Why it works: Memories bring comfort. Facts bring pain.

DO THIS

Gently redirect after a while.

vs**NOT THAT**

Invent detailed stories.

Why it works: Simple redirection avoids confusion later.

More ways to help on the next page →

26

Asking for a Parent or Spouse Who Has Died*continued***say
this***"You're thinking about your mom. Tell me about her."**"What was she like?"**"You really love him. He loved you too."***✓ Do**

- ✓ Talk about the person and the good memories.
- ✓ Respond to the feeling: missing, worry, love.
- ✓ Look at photos together.
- ✓ Gently redirect after a while.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Remind them the person is dead.
- ✗ Argue about the facts.
- ✗ Make up detailed stories that may confuse them later.
- ✗ Avoid the subject completely.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- A photo album of that person to look at together.
- Familiar music they shared.
- A calm place to sit and talk.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If they're grieving constantly or seem depressed.

Dr. Vera's tip

Ask 'What would she say to you right now?' It brings comfort without correcting them.

27

Hallucinations: Seeing or Hearing Things That Aren't There

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Seeing people, animals or bugs; hearing voices; talking to people who aren't there.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Changes in the brain, poor vision, shadows, infections and some medications can cause them. Common in Lewy body dementia.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"I don't see it, but I believe you. I'll keep you safe."

vs

NOT THAT

"There's nothing there!"

Why it works: Their fear is real even if the image isn't.

DO THIS

Turn on lights and check for shadows.

vs

NOT THAT

Leave the room dim.

Why it works: Shadows and reflections often cause what they see.

DO THIS

Call the doctor before any sleep aid or sedative.

vs

NOT THAT

Give an over-the-counter sleep aid.

Why it works: Some dementias react badly to these medications.

More ways to help on the next page →

27

Hallucinations: Seeing or Hearing Things That Aren't There

continued

say
this

"That sounds scary. I'll keep you safe."

"I don't see it, but I believe you see it."

"Let's go to the kitchen together."

✓ Do

- ✓ Stay calm and reassure them.
- ✓ Check the room: shadows, reflections, patterns.
- ✓ Turn on lights; close curtains at night.
- ✓ Move to a different room or activity.
- ✓ If it doesn't upset them, it may not need action.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Argue that it isn't real.
- ✗ Pretend to see it too.
- ✗ Laugh or dismiss their fear.
- ✗ Give sleep aids or anti-psychotics without the doctor; some dementias react badly.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Bright, even lighting with no dark corners.
- Remove or cover mirrors if they cause fear.
- Clean glasses and check hearing aids.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

New hallucinations. Check for infection, medication side effects or other causes.

Dr. Vera's tip

Walk through the room at dusk. A coat on a hook or a shadow on the wall can look like a stranger.

28

Paranoia: Believing People Are Stealing From Them

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

'Someone took my purse!', accusing family or caregivers of stealing, or hiding valuables.

WHY IT HAPPENS

They forget where they put things. 'Someone stole it' makes more sense to their brain than 'I forgot.'

✓ **THIS**

✗ **NOT THAT**

SAY THIS

"That's upsetting. Let's look for it together."

vs

NOT THAT

"Nobody stole it. You lost it."

Why it works: Helping them look ends the accusation faster.

DO THIS

Keep duplicates of glasses, keys and wallet.

vs

NOT THAT

Search for hours every time.

Why it works: A spare ends the crisis in seconds.

DO THIS

Learn their favorite hiding spots.

vs

NOT THAT

Take the accusation personally.

Why it works: Most 'stolen' items turn up in the same few places.

More ways to help on the next page →

28

Paranoia: Believing People Are Stealing From Them

continued

say
this

"I'm sorry you can't find it. Let's look together."

"That's upsetting. I'll help you."

"Is this the one you were looking for?"

✓ Do

- ✓ Help them look without arguing.
- ✓ Learn their favorite hiding spots.
- ✓ Keep duplicates of often-lost items: glasses, wallets, keys.
- ✓ Reassure them their things are safe.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Take the accusation personally.
- ✗ Argue or defend yourself.
- ✗ Say 'You just lost it.'
- ✗ Leave important documents or cash where they can hide them.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Put valuables and documents in a safe place.
- Keep a spare wallet with a small amount of cash.
- Check wastebaskets before emptying them.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If paranoia is new, severe or getting worse.

Dr. Vera's tip

Let them 'find' the item themselves: 'Could it be in your drawer?' It restores their confidence.

29

Accusing a Spouse of Cheating

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Accusing their spouse of an affair, jealousy of caregivers, or anger at their partner.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Memory gaps, fear of being left and misreading situations can lead to jealousy. It's a symptom, not a judgment.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"I love you. I'm not going anywhere."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"How could you think that?"

Why it works: Reassurance meets the fear under the accusation.

DO THIS

Spend calm time together every day.

vs

NOT THAT

Defend yourself or prove your innocence.

Why it works: Closeness quiets the jealousy. Arguing feeds it.

DO THIS

Tell the doctor about it.

vs

NOT THAT

Keep it to yourself.

Why it works: Delusions like this can be symptoms that respond to treatment.

More ways to help on the next page →

29

Accusing a Spouse of Cheating

continued

say
this*"I love you. I'm right here."**"I'm not going anywhere."**"Let's sit together."*

✓ Do

- ✓ Reassure with affection and presence.
- ✓ Stay calm and don't defend yourself.
- ✓ Redirect to a shared activity.
- ✓ Talk with a support group. It helps to know others go through this.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Argue or try to prove your innocence.
- ✗ Show anger or hurt in the moment.
- ✗ Leave them alone with someone they feel jealous of.
- ✗ Keep this to yourself. Tell the doctor.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Shared routines and time together each day.
- Photos of your life together.
- A caregiver they already know and trust.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Delusions like this should be discussed with the doctor.

Dr. Vera's tip

Remind yourself: 'This is the disease.' Write it down and put it where you'll see it.

30 Not Recognizing Family Members

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Calling you by the wrong name, asking who you are, or thinking you're a stranger or someone from the past.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia affects facial recognition and memory. It doesn't mean the love is gone.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"Hi Mom, it's me, Ana, your daughter."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"Don't you know who I am?"

Why it works: Introducing yourself removes the test they can't pass.

DO THIS

Stay warm even if they don't know you.

vs

NOT THAT

Show hurt or cry in front of them.

Why it works: They remember how you made them feel.

DO THIS

Labeled family photos with names.

vs

NOT THAT

Quiz them on names.

Why it works: Photos give memory a gentle nudge.

More ways to help on the next page →

30

Not Recognizing Family Members

continued

**say
this***"Hi, Mom. It's me, Ana, your daughter."**"I'm Ana. I'm here to help."**"It's good to see you."***✓ Do**

- ✓ Introduce yourself each time, gently.
- ✓ Stay warm, even if they don't know you.
- ✓ Go along with who they think you are, if it's harmless.
- ✓ Use photos and shared memories.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Quiz them: 'Don't you know who I am?'
- ✗ Show hurt or tears in the moment.
- ✗ Correct them repeatedly.
- ✗ Stop visiting. They still feel your warmth.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Labeled photos of family members with names.
- Name tags at family gatherings.
- Short, calm visits.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If recognition changes suddenly.

Dr. Vera's tip

*They may forget who you are but remember how you make them feel.
That's the part that lasts.*

31

Believing It's a Different Year or They Need to Go to Work

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Getting ready for work, looking for children who are now grown, talking about the past as the present.

WHY IT HAPPENS

They may be living in an earlier time. Old routines and roles feel real.

✓ **THIS**

✗ **NOT THAT**

SAY THIS

"Tell me about your work."

vs

NOT THAT

"You've been retired for 20 years."

Why it works: Joining their time is kinder and faster than correcting it.

DO THIS

Give them a 'work' task: files, tools, recipes.

vs

NOT THAT

Argue about the year.

Why it works: A familiar role satisfies the need to be useful.

DO THIS

Keep familiar items from their working life around.

vs

NOT THAT

Remove all reminders of the past.

Why it works: Familiar objects bring comfort and purpose.

More ways to help on the next page →

31

Believing It's a Different Year or They Need to Go to Work

continued

say
this

"Tell me about your work."

"The office called. They said to take today off."

"You worked so hard. What did you do?"

✓ Do

- ✓ Go along with their reality when it's safe.
- ✓ Ask about their job or family memories.
- ✓ Give them a related task: paperwork, tools, cooking.
- ✓ Redirect gently.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Correct the year or say 'You're retired.'
- ✗ Argue.
- ✗ Laugh at their confusion.
- ✗ Let them leave the house alone.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- A 'work station' with papers, tools or files.
- A daily routine with a sense of purpose.
- Familiar items from their working life.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If it comes on suddenly or with other new symptoms.

Dr. Vera's tip

Meet them in their year. Joining them is kinder and faster than pulling them back to yours.

32

Talking to the Mirror or the TV as if They're Real People

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Talking to their reflection, being scared of 'the person in the mirror,' or thinking TV characters are real.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia affects recognition and the ability to tell images from reality.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"Let's go to the kitchen together."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"That's just your reflection."

Why it works: Changing the scene works better than explaining.

DO THIS

Cover mirrors if they cause fear.

vs

NOT THAT

Leave mirrors that scare them.

Why it works: Remove the trigger, remove the fear.

DO THIS

Calm shows: nature, music, old favorites.

vs

NOT THAT

The news or violent shows.

Why it works: What's on screen can feel real to them.

More ways to help on the next page →

32

Talking to the Mirror or the TV as if They're Real People

continued

say
this

"Let's go to the kitchen."

"It's okay. I'm here."

"Let's find something else to watch."

✓ Do

- ✓ Let it be if it's pleasant.
- ✓ Cover or remove mirrors if it frightens them.
- ✓ Choose calm TV: nature, music, old favorites.
- ✓ Turn off the TV when they're upset.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Argue that it's just a reflection.
- ✗ Leave violent or scary shows on.
- ✗ Laugh at them.
- ✗ Ignore fear or distress.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Cover mirrors at night.
- Close curtains at dusk to prevent reflections in windows.
- A set of calm, familiar videos.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If it comes with new hallucinations or fear.

Dr. Vera's tip

Friendly 'chats' with the mirror can be comforting. Only step in when it causes fear.

part five

Sleep and Time of Day



Sundowning and sleepless nights. How to reset the body clock and get your nights back.

In this part

- | | | |
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| 34 | Waking Up at Night and Getting Up | p. 84 |
| 35 | Nighttime Wandering | p. 86 |
| 36 | Nightmares or Waking Up Scared | p. 88 |
| 37 | Sleeping All Day and Staying Awake All Night | p. 90 |
-

Remember C.A.L.M.

Check the cause • **A**adjust yourself • **L**isten to the feeling • **M**ove the moment



Sundowning: Late-Afternoon Confusion and Agitation

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

More confusion, pacing, anxiety or anger in the late afternoon or evening.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Tiredness, fading light, hunger, pain and a disrupted body clock can make the evening harder.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"Let's have some tea and listen to music."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"Why are you acting like this again?"

Why it works: A calm activity resets the evening.

DO THIS

Turn on bright lights before 4 p.m.

vs

NOT THAT

Let the house get dark.

Why it works: Fading light is a major sundowning trigger.

DO THIS

Plan outings and visitors for the morning.

vs

NOT THAT

Schedule busy afternoons.

Why it works: Energy runs out by late afternoon.

More ways to help on the next page →

33

Sundowning: Late-Afternoon Confusion and Agitation

continued

say
this

"Let's have some tea and listen to music."

"I'm here. We're safe."

"Could you help me fold these?"

✓ Do

- ✓ Get morning sunlight and daily activity.
- ✓ Schedule outings and appointments for the morning.
- ✓ Keep afternoons calm and quiet.
- ✓ Offer a snack in the late afternoon.
- ✓ Turn lights on before it gets dark.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Plan busy activities or visitors in the late afternoon.
- ✗ Give caffeine after lunch.
- ✗ Let them nap for hours.
- ✗ Argue or rush them.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Bright lights inside before sunset.
- Close curtains to hide darkness and reflections.
- Soft music and a calm evening routine.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Sudden worsening, or with new confusion or pain. Check for infection or medication effects.

Dr. Vera's tip

Turn on every light in the house at 4 p.m. Bright light helps keep the body clock steady.

34

Waking Up at Night and Getting Up

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Getting out of bed at night, dressing, wandering around the house, or calling out.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Changes in the brain's sleep cycle, daytime napping, a full bladder, pain or needing the bathroom.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

"It's nighttime. Let's go back to bed."

vs**✗ NOT THAT****NOT THAT**

"It's 3 a.m.! What are you doing?"

Why it works: A soft voice keeps the brain in sleep mode.

DO THIS

Low lights and a quick bathroom trip.

vs**NOT THAT**

Bright lights and conversation.

Why it works: Brightness and talking wake them fully.

DO THIS

Keep naps short and before 2 p.m.

vs**NOT THAT**

Let them nap all afternoon.

Why it works: Long naps steal nighttime sleep.

More ways to help on the next page →

34

Waking Up at Night and Getting Up

continued

say
this*"It's nighttime. Let's go back to bed."**"Do you need the bathroom?"**"I'm here. Everything's fine."*

✓ Do

- ✓ Check for needs: bathroom, pain, hunger, temperature.
- ✓ Keep the lights low and your voice calm.
- ✓ Guide them back to bed gently.
- ✓ Limit naps during the day.
- ✓ Keep active and in the sun during the day.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Turn on bright lights.
- ✗ Start a conversation or activity.
- ✗ Argue about the time.
- ✗ Give over-the-counter sleep aids; they can worsen confusion.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Night lights to the bathroom.
- A bed alarm or motion sensor.
- A bedside commode.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If night waking is new, frequent or affecting your sleep. Ask about sleep problems and pain.

Dr. Vera's tip

Many sleep aids (like those with 'PM' on the label) can increase confusion. Ask the doctor before using any.

35

Nighttime Wandering

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Walking around the house or trying to leave at night.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Confusion about time, restlessness, needing the bathroom or looking for something.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

"Come with me. I'll walk you back."

vs**✗ NOT THAT****NOT THAT**

"Get back in bed now!"

Why it works: Walking with them works better than ordering them.

DO THIS

Door alarms and motion-sensor lights.

vs**NOT THAT**

Hope you'll hear them.

Why it works: Alarms wake you before they reach the door.

DO THIS

Clear walkways and add night lights.

vs**NOT THAT**

Restrain them in bed.

Why it works: Restraints cause injuries and panic.

More ways to help on the next page →

35

Nighttime Wandering

continued

say
this

"It's the middle of the night. Let's rest."

"Come with me, I'll walk you back."

"Let's get a glass of water and go back to bed."

✓ Do

- ✓ Walk with them calmly.
- ✓ Give a small snack or drink if they're hungry.
- ✓ Take them to the bathroom.
- ✓ Guide them back to bed.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Scold or argue.
- ✗ Restrain them in bed.
- ✗ Turn on bright lights.
- ✗ Ignore the risk of falls.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Door alarms and motion sensors.
- Locks placed high or low on outside doors.
- Clear walkways and night lights.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If it happens frequently. Ask about sleep and medication review.

Dr. Vera's tip

A motion-sensor light by the bed helps you both: they can see, and you wake up when they get up.

36

Nightmares or Waking Up Scared

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Screaming, shouting, crying or acting out dreams at night; waking up confused and frightened.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Changes in the brain, medications and stressful days can cause bad dreams. Acting out dreams is common in Lewy body dementia.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"It was a dream. You're safe. I'm here."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"It wasn't real, go back to sleep."

Why it works: Comfort first, facts later.

DO THIS

A soft light, water and a calm presence.

vs

NOT THAT

Shake them awake roughly.

Why it works: Gentle waking prevents more fear.

DO THIS

Calm last hour before bed: no news, soft music.

vs

NOT THAT

Scary TV before bed.

Why it works: What goes in before sleep shows up in dreams.

More ways to help on the next page →

36

Nightmares or Waking Up Scared

continued

say
this

"You're safe. I'm here."

"It was a dream. Everything's okay."

"Let's sit together for a while."

✓ Do

- ✓ Reassure them calmly.
- ✓ Turn on a soft light.
- ✓ Offer a drink of water or a hug.
- ✓ Stay until they calm down.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Shake them awake roughly.
- ✗ Argue about what they saw.
- ✗ Leave them alone while scared.
- ✗ Allow scary TV before bed.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Calming routine before bed.
- Soft night light.
- Pad the bed area if they move a lot in their sleep.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If it's frequent or they act out dreams. It could be a sign of a specific sleep disorder.

Dr. Vera's tip

Keep the last hour before bed calm: no news, no arguments, soft music.

37 Sleeping All Day and Staying Awake All Night

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Long naps during the day, awake and restless at night.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia disrupts the body clock. Lack of daylight and activity makes it worse.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"Good morning! Let's open the curtains."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"Just sleep in today."

Why it works: Morning light resets the body clock.

DO THIS

Same wake time and bedtime every day.

vs

NOT THAT

Let the schedule drift.

Why it works: A steady routine rebuilds the sleep cycle.

DO THIS

Keep them active during the day.

vs

NOT THAT

Long TV sessions in the dark.

Why it works: Daytime activity builds nighttime tiredness.

More ways to help on the next page →

37

Sleeping All Day and Staying Awake All Night

continued

**say
this***"Let's go outside for some sun."**"Can you help me with this project?"**"Good morning! Time for breakfast."***✓ Do**

- ✓ Keep a regular wake time and bedtime.
- ✓ Get sunlight in the morning.
- ✓ Keep them active during the day.
- ✓ Limit naps to 30 minutes before 2 p.m.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Let them sleep all day.
- ✗ Give caffeine in the afternoon.
- ✗ Allow long TV sessions in the dark.
- ✗ Use sleep aids without the doctor's advice.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Bright lights during the day.
- Dark, quiet bedroom at night.
- A daily schedule on the wall.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If sleep is badly reversed. Ask about medications and sleep problems.

Dr. Vera's tip

Open all curtains first thing in the morning. Morning light resets the body clock.

part six

Social and Personal Behaviors



Hiding, rummaging and embarrassing moments. How to respond with dignity, not shame.

In this part

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| 39 | Rummaging Through Drawers, Closets and Other People's Things | p. 96 |
| 40 | Sexually Inappropriate Behavior or Undressing in Public | p. 98 |
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Remember C.A.L.M.

Check the cause • **A**adjust yourself • **L**isten to the feeling • **M**ove the moment

38

Hoarding or Hiding Items

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Hiding food, money or objects; collecting items; things going missing.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Hiding things makes them feel safe and in control. Memory loss makes them forget where they put things.

✓ THIS**SAY THIS**

"Let's put this somewhere safe together."

vs**✗ NOT THAT****NOT THAT**

"Why do you keep hiding things?"

Why it works: Joining them respects their need to feel secure.

DO THIS

Give them a 'treasure box' of their own.

vs**NOT THAT**

Throw things out in front of them.

Why it works: A safe place to keep things satisfies the urge.

DO THIS

Check hiding spots for old food regularly.

vs**NOT THAT**

Let hidden food spoil.

Why it works: Spoiled food is a real health risk.

More ways to help on the next page →

38

Hoarding or Hiding Items

continued

say
this*"Let's put this somewhere safe together."**"Can you show me your special place?"**"That's a nice collection."*

✓ Do

- ✓ Learn their hiding spots.
- ✓ Keep a 'treasure box' where they can store things.
- ✓ Clear out old food regularly.
- ✓ Lock up valuables.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Throw everything out in front of them.
- ✗ Scold or argue.
- ✗ Let food rot in hidden places.
- ✗ Leave medications or money where they can hide them.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- A special drawer or box for their things.
- Remove clutter from their reach.
- Check pockets before laundry.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If hoarding is new or causes health risks.

Dr. Vera's tip

Give them a purse or box of 'safe' items to keep. It satisfies the need to collect.

39

Rummaging Through Drawers, Closets and Other People's Things

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Going through drawers, closets, trash or other people's belongings.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Looking for something familiar, boredom, or the need to be busy.

✓ **THIS**

✗ **NOT THAT**

SAY THIS

"What are you looking for?
Let me help."

vs

NOT THAT

"Get out of there!"

Why it works: They're often searching for something familiar.

DO THIS

**Make a rummage drawer
with safe items.**

vs

NOT THAT

Leave important papers in reach.

Why it works: Rummaging is fine when it's safe.

DO THIS

**Child locks on private
drawers.**

vs

NOT THAT

Scold them every time.

Why it works: Locks prevent the problem without conflict.

More ways to help on the next page →

39

Rummaging Through Drawers, Closets and Other People's Things

continued

say
this

"What are you looking for? Let me help."

"Here's a drawer just for you."

"Could you help me sort these?"

✓ Do

- ✓ Give them a 'rummage drawer' with safe items.
- ✓ Keep them busy with sorting tasks.
- ✓ Lock drawers with private or dangerous items.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Scold them.
- ✗ Leave dangerous items in reach.
- ✗ Leave important papers out.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- A rummage box with fabric, buttons, old photos and socks.
- Child locks on drawers.
- A daily task of sorting or folding.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

If it comes with new confusion or agitation.

Dr. Vera's tip

Fill a drawer with things from their past, like work items or sewing supplies. It keeps them busy and happy.



Sexually Inappropriate Behavior or Undressing in Public

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Undressing in public, touching themselves, making sexual comments or advances.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Dementia affects impulse control and social rules. Undressing may mean they're hot, uncomfortable or need the bathroom.

✓ THIS

SAY THIS

"Let's go somewhere private."

vs

✗ NOT THAT

NOT THAT

"That's disgusting! Stop it!"

Why it works: Calm redirection protects their dignity.

DO THIS

Check if they're hot, itchy or need the bathroom.

vs

NOT THAT

Assume it's sexual.

Why it works: Most undressing is about comfort, not sex.

DO THIS

Back-closing or one-piece clothing.

vs

NOT THAT

Easy-off clothes in public.

Why it works: The right clothing prevents it in the first place.

More ways to help on the next page →

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Sexually Inappropriate Behavior or Undressing in Public

continued

say
this

"Let's go somewhere private."

"Are you too warm? Let's find something cooler."

"Here, hold this for me."

✓ Do

- ✓ Stay calm and redirect.
- ✓ Check for needs: bathroom, heat, itchy clothes.
- ✓ Take them to a private place.
- ✓ Give their hands something to do.

✗ Don't

- ✗ Shame or scold them.
- ✗ Overreact.
- ✗ Ignore it.
- ✗ Assume it's intentional.

CHANGE THE SETUP

- Clothes that are hard to remove: back-closing, one-piece.
- Comfortable fabrics and room temperature.
- Regular bathroom trips.

CALL THE DOCTOR IF

Always tell the doctor. It may be treatable.

Dr. Vera's tip

Look for the need first. Most undressing is about comfort, not sex.

Take care of the person holding this book.

Burnout makes every behavior in this manual harder to handle. Protecting your own energy is part of good care, not a break from it.

Take real breaks.

Even 20 minutes a day. Ask family, a friend, a neighbor or an adult day program to cover for you.

Say yes to help.

When someone offers, give them a specific job: 'Could you sit with Mom Thursday from 2 to 4?'

Watch your own health.

Keep your own doctor visits. Notice changes in your sleep, mood, appetite or patience.

Lower the bar.

A clean, safe, fed person is a good day. Skipped baths and messy rooms are not failures.

Find your people.

A caregiver support group, in person or online, is one of the best protections against burnout.

Forgive yourself.

You will lose your temper sometimes. Apologize, move on, and try again. Your loved one moves on quickly too.

Feeling overwhelmed right now? Call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline. If you ever feel you might hurt yourself or someone else, call or text 988.

1-800-272-3900

Behavior detective log

Write down each hard moment for one or two weeks. Patterns will show up: the same time of day, the same task, the same trigger. Bring this log to the doctor, too.

Date & time	What happened just before?	What was the behavior?	What did I try?	Did it work?

Tip: look for patterns in the first column. Many behaviors cluster in the late afternoon, around bathing, or when the house is busy.

about the author

Dr. Fernando Vera, OT



Dr. Fernando Vera is a licensed occupational therapist and the owner and clinical director of Empower Health, a clinic specializing in dementia care. He and his team help families find support, reduce caregiver burnout and unlock benefits most never discover, including enrollment in Medicare's GUIDE Program for people living with dementia.

His work is personal. His mother, Virginia, was healthy and active when she was diagnosed with Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a rapidly progressing form of dementia. Caring for her taught him what no textbook could: caregivers need clear, practical answers they can use in the moment.

He is also the creator of the Dementia Behavior Coach app, The Activity Idea Book and The Sundown Plan.

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