

# How to Know It's Time to Move

Dementia care today is far different than in the past. With research showing the impact of meaningful engagement and social connection on those with dementia, innovative providers now make purposeful programming and supportive environments that focus on the whole person part of their standard of care. As a result, people with dementia often fare better and enjoy life more in such a setting than in the isolation of home.

However, for many families, the idea of moving a loved one into a dementia care community still evokes uncertainty and guilt. Experts say safety, quality of life and the roots of one's feelings are all important considerations in making this decision.

"Safety issues create a special urgency," said Juliet Holt Klinger, senior director of dementia care for Brookdale. "If the person living with dementia is now in physical danger from wandering that the family can't control, falling repeatedly or creating hazards such as turning on the stove and leaving it on, living at home has become dangerous for all involved."

Behavioral expressions of frustration, such as resistance to caregiving, pushing or even hitting, that jeopardize others may be occurring. Additionally, caregiver stress might have become so chronic that it's impossible to safely care for the loved one's needs. "You may not be getting enough sleep due to their night restlessness," Holt Klinger said. "Perhaps you are almost falling asleep during your day job or no longer have the strength to carry out the physical work of caring."

When safety has become compromised to this point, providing care at home may no longer be advisable or feasible, Holt Klinger said. "It is now impossible for one person to do this job. It requires a team of specially trained professional caregivers who can provide what's needed around the clock."

While quality of life issues may be less obvious when considering a move, they are also very important. They can appear even in dementia's early stage, when people seem to be functioning fairly well, but are starting to lose the ability to keep up with long-time pursuits and friends. "An example would be the person whose life has revolved around playing bridge and volunteering at the library," Holt Klinger said. "This has provided purpose, defined who he is and created a community for him."

As dementia begins making it hard to carry on, he slowly withdraws from these activities. Isolation, boredom, frustration, loss of self-esteem and ultimately depression can set in. "It doesn't take long for this to happen and unfortunately, it becomes a cyclical process," Holt Klinger said. "The lack of stimulation and being depressed can aggravate dementia's symptoms."

For this reason, moving into dementia care community early in the disease process can be very beneficial, providing a vibrant environment of new friends and purposeful engagement matched to an individual's abilities. An example is Brookdale's Clare Bridge

Crossings program, designed for those in dementia's early stages.

"Research shows that programs tailored to people in the initial phase can make a big difference in sustaining their abilities and possibly delaying advancement of the disease," said Holt Klinger, Brookdale's senior director of dementia care program development. "This is a major focus of Clare Bridge Crossings, where we have designed the programming to build up brain synapses and resilience and to provide joy and purpose."

Clare Bridge Crossings residents take part daily in activities that engage mentally, socially and physically. On a given day, they might visit a museum to discover its exhibits, learn square dancing as a way to practice processing information and moving the body; write their life stories in a journal; expand their horizons through technology; and make friends.

Despite the compelling reasons to move, many families still struggle with feelings of guilt. "This is understandable, especially for spouses who have vowed to always care for each other," Holt Klinger said. "Some have promised to keep their loved one at home, no matter what and they worry they are breaking this pledge."

This issue is why it's best for couples to talk about this topic well in advance, ideally before dementia is even a consideration in their lives. A frank discussion can clarify what each person wants and expects.

"The greatest risk factor for dementia is age and of course, our aging populations is rising," Holt Klinger said. "This is creating a set of circumstances that previous generations of families have not dealt with to such a degree."

She also urges families to consider what the definition of "home" is as dementia progresses. "We know that home should be a place where we feel cared for, comfortable, happy and uniquely important as an individual. In my view, an innovative dementia care community can certainly become that place for people with dementia who are isolated where they have been living."