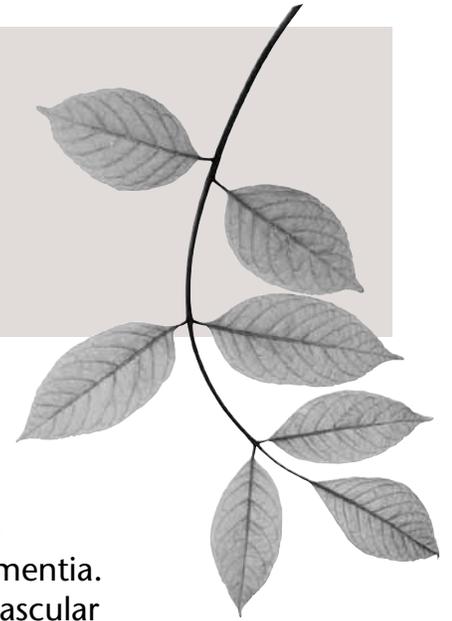


# Dementia, abuse and neglect



## What is dementia?

Dementia is a term used to describe different brain disorders that have in common a progressive loss of brain function (memory, communication and learning). Dementia may also cause changes in mood or personality. There are more than 100 different types of dementia. The most common forms of dementia are Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia. Dementia can happen to anybody, but is most common in people over the age of 65.

## What is the relationship between dementia and abuse?

People with dementia may be more vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and self-neglect. Contributing factors to abuse, neglect and self-neglect include living arrangements (living alone), degree of cognitive decline and behavioural changes.

Caring for a person with dementia can be challenging. Training, information and respite can assist caregivers in meeting these challenges.

## Does the stress of care-giving cause abuse?

**Stress does not cause abuse.** Everyone experiences stress from time to time. Most caregivers do not resort to abuse in times of stress. Stress may be an excuse used by an abuser in an attempt to justify his or her behaviour.

At times, providing care for a person with dementia can be challenging. Individuals with dementia may become confused and frustrated and even demonstrate aggressive behaviour towards their caregivers. It is important that caregivers understand the nature of the individual's dementia, and learn ways of de-escalating aggressive behaviour without responding inappropriately.

**There are varying degrees of dementia. Dementia does not necessarily mean an individual is incapable of making decisions affecting his or her life.**

### **Tips to share with older persons: prevention of abuse and neglect**

- If you or someone you know is being abused, talk to someone you trust, such as a health professional, doctor, counsellor or employee of the Seniors' Services/Adult Protection Unit.
- Some forms of abuse are crimes (e.g., threats and physical or sexual assault) — call the RCMP for assistance.
- You can ask trusted family and friends to help you ensure that your values are respected in regard to legal documents such as an Enduring Power of Attorney, a Will or an Advance Directive.

### **Tips for family, friends and caregivers: prevention of abuse and neglect**

- Don't assume that all changes in the behaviour of an individual with dementia are related to the progression of dementia — assist him or her in obtaining a medical opinion.
- Family and friends can act when dementia is suspected to ensure that an older person's values are respected in regard to legal documents such as an Enduring Power of Attorney, a Will or an Advance Directive.
- Foster and prolong autonomy by offering supports, patience and understanding.
- If you are a caregiver and are concerned that you may become abusive, seek help now.



**Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity**

**You are not alone — help and support are available**

**Seniors' Services/Adult Protection Unit: phone 456-3946; toll-free 1-800-661-0408, ext. 3946**