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Memory Care Day Care: A Guide to Adult Day Centers for Seniors with Dementia

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Adult day centers offer a lively environment similar to a summer day camp, but they cater to the needs of seniors, allowing them to enjoy activities and meals in a social setting outside their homes. Adult day care is open to all seniors, but it's especially helpful for the elderly with dementia. It especially benefits family caregivers struggling to balance caregiving and other obligations. Dementia day care can offer caregivers respite and resources like support groups, education, and counseling. These centers also improve the quality of life for seniors with dementia with specialized dementia programs and services.

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Key Takeaways

1. **Seniors with dementia and caregivers can benefit from adult day centers** because they provide caregivers respite while improving quality of life for care recipients.
2. **There are different types of adult day centers to accommodate different needs.** Options include health day centers, social day centers, and specialized day centers.
3. **Many day care centers offer specialized programming for dementia** including social, therapeutic, and brain-stimulating activities.
4. **There are endless benefits of dementia day care for seniors** including added safety, improved mood, and better overall quality of life.

What is an adult day center?

Adult day centers provide social and some health services to adults who need supervised care in a safe place outside the home during the day. The services are as varied as the participants they serve, but centers can be categorized into three distinct models:

- **Health day centers** include health and therapeutic services provided by medical professionals. Many of these centers also offer meals in addition to social and physical activities.

- **Social day centers** provide a variety of activities, from social

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and [memory care](#) activities for individuals with chronic conditions, such as dementia, or cognitive or physical disabilities.

While the models differ, most centers provide meals, activities, and socialization for participants. These centers are generally in operation during the day and throughout the week, and some even offer evening and weekend hours. Some centers provide transportation, an added perk for caregivers who remain in the workforce.

Furthermore, specialized day centers that specifically cater to seniors with dementia are designed to help reduce [common dementia symptoms](#). They often promote reminiscence among Alzheimer's patients through intentional decor and activities pertinent to years when their memories were the strongest.

How do adult day care centers cater to seniors with dementia?

Adult day care is available to all seniors, but nearly half of all day care participants have some level of dementia.^[01] To properly cater to their needs, day care centers provide relevant programming for dementia patients.

“One of the keys to having a successful day center for people with dementia is you need to have a successful activities program,” said Salli Bollin, executive director of Memory Lane Care Services, a day center in Toledo, Ohio that offers special programming for individuals with Alzheimer's and other dementias.

Examples of specialized programming and services you may find at a memory care day center:

- [Music therapy](#)
- Pet therapy

- Arts and crafts

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- Cooking or baking
- Socialization events
- Cognitive stimulation
- Transportation
- Health and wellness activities

Successful dementia day centers will take the time to collect information about a participant's history, according to Bollin. She believes that while a center may strive to create intentional activities aimed at stimulating positive memories, knowing a participant's background will also help avoid triggering negative memories from their past.



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What are the benefits of day care for dementia?

Dementia day care can provide services that help enable seniors with Alzheimer's and other dementias to remain engaged and active

in their community. However, research shows that caregivers are the main beneficiaries

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“Evidence around the benefits of adult day services is really strongest in relationship to the caregiver,” said [Holly Dabelko-Schoeny, PhD](#), an associate professor and director of research for the Age-Friendly Innovation Center at The Ohio State College of Social Work. “We know that caregivers who care for individuals with dementia have the highest feelings of stress and burden of all caregivers.”

Memory care day centers can help to alleviate stress and [caregiver burnout](#) by providing these benefits:

- **Respite care** allows caregivers to rest, continue to work, take care of household responsibilities, and remain engaged in their community.
- **A reduction of caregiving tasks** reduces stress and [health risks for dementia caregivers](#). Most centers provide meals, and some even provide assistance with personal tasks.
- **Peace of mind** comes from caregivers knowing that their loved one will receive appropriate health care and socialization.

Benefits of day care for dementia patients

Memory care day centers provide a spectrum of services, so the benefits can extend into a number of areas for seniors with dementia:

- **Socialization.** Socialization helps to reduce or [prevent isolation in seniors](#). “When people with Alzheimer’s or dementia are connected, they’re a completely different person,” said [Joan Marie Granato](#), owner of Future Focus Inc., an adult day service consulting company.

Memory care day centers have health

professionals on staff who can provide both health care and daily monitoring.

- **A sense of self-worth.** Participants engage in activities that

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- **Improved mood.** “Participants may not remember exactly what they did in terms of activities or engagement but they seem to remember how they felt,” said Dabelko-Schoeny.
- **Improved sleep.** Emerging evidence shows that regular adult day services help individuals with dementia get to bed earlier and prevent sleep disturbances.^[02]
- **Safety.** Participants enjoy activities and socialization in a safe and structured environment where they are supervised and have access to health services, wellness monitoring, medication administration, and nutritious meals.

Why are dementia day care centers a good memory care option?

Dementia day care centers are commonly considered a good memory care option due to their services and programming. However, there are several reasons why memory care day centers can be a good long-term care option for individuals with dementia, as well as for their caregivers:

- **Enhanced quality of life at home.** Evidence suggests that adult day services may allow individuals to remain at home longer. In some cases, they may avoid needing to transition into an [assisted living facility](#) or [nursing home](#).
- **Specially trained staff.** The care team at dementia day centers often includes health professionals, activity professionals, and direct care workers. These skilled experts tend to have specific training and an understanding of how to work with individuals with dementia, according to Dabelko-Schoeny.
- **Additional services on an as-needed basis.** Adult day care centers for dementia offer flexibility, so families have a variety of options to best fit the needs of their loved ones. Bollin sees adult day centers as part of the continuum of

care for a loved one with dementia, and she points out that they can be used in combination with other services, such as

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patients can be a good alternative where there is a waiting list for [in-home care](#), or when in-home care is not available in certain areas.

- **Transition support system.** Day centers can be a good way to help a loved one prepare for the [transition into memory care](#).
- **Affordable pricing.** The median cost of an adult day center is \$78 per day, compared to the daily cost of in-home care, which can stretch to nearly \$170 per day.^[03]

Many adult day centers also act as a pipeline to other community-based resources, said Dabelko-Schoeny. Nurses and social workers at centers can help families connect to services such as home health or hospice care.

Read more: [What Is Hospice Care at Home? Services, Payment, and What to Expect](#)

When should caregivers consider a day care for seniors with dementia?

“As soon as possible,” said Granato. She explained that encouraging socialization and different routines helps prevent the feeling of isolation during the onset of dementia.

Some of the factors that may help reduce or prevent someone with dementia from needing a higher level of care include how long they have been attending an adult day center and how frequently, stated Dabelko-Schoeny.



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How do I choose an adult day center for a loved one with dementia?

When choosing an adult day center for a loved one with dementia, you should always take a tour to allow for personal assessment, according to Bollin. Then, you can consider a trial period, if your potential adult day center allows for one.

The following questions may help ensure that you find the best-fit memory care day center for the elderly with dementia:

- What type of model is the day center?
- What type of programming do they offer?
- What are the hours of the center?
- Does staff receive regular training for working with individuals with Alzheimer's and other dementias?
- What are the staffing ratios?
- What hours are medical professionals available?
- What are the meal options? Can the center accommodate dietary restrictions?
- What does a typical day at the center look like?
- Does the center provide transportation?

Regulations of adult day centers are not federally standardized, so [licensing and certifications can vary between states](#). Dabelko-Schoeny recommends asking if the center is a member of any adult


day service professional trade associations, such as [NADSA](#) or [LeadingAge](#). This would indicate that the center is


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One more thing to consider when searching for a memory care day center — make sure you are realistic about your loved one's needs and abilities, explained Granato. As a caregiver, getting support is important, but taking the time to find the right memory care day center will help both you and your loved one.


Are you a caregiver considering adult day care for dementia for a loved one? A Place for Mom's local, experienced [Senior Living Advisors](#) can help you find dementia day care options to accommodate a holistic approach to memory care and match your lifestyle needs – all at no cost to you.

Families also ask

Are there any adult day care/memory care programs that don't require Medicaid or long-term care insurance? 

Where can you find a day care program for someone who has Alzheimer's? 

How does one manage to get to adult day care? Do they provide a door-to-door shuttle service? 

How much does adult day care cost? Do Medicare, Medicaid, or VA benefits cover/subsidize any of that cost? 

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and other senior care types, home care costs, and how to pay. Kevin's desire to support seniors and their families stems from his previous career as a teacher, plus his experience as a writer and community journalist.

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