

# Difficult Truths about Memory Impairments

By Donna Deos

You know by now that I tend to write to you based on what I hear to be recurring themes in people's lives at the time. Well, lately I've been hearing a lot about the challenges of memory impairments. Please keep in mind that I am writing this from my heart to yours. I know what this says is not what you will want to hear and I send you love and kind thoughts as you deal with this.

A big question that people have when a loved one starts to show struggles with memory issues, is where should they live? People often look in to communities (sometimes referred to as facilities – although it is a less appealing word, but tends to be used more for the folks with higher needs than those in the independent living and continuing care options). They also tend to get sticker shock at the cost of the various options. Plus, they get protective of the family nest egg/fortune and find it undesirable to think it could all be spent on care needs. However, whichever route you go this is still likely to be the end result – I am sorry to say. This is because people with memory impairments tend to be pretty okay physically and can therefore live a long time while requiring lots of assistance.

I completely understand the fear of losing the person's entire life savings as my own Grandmother spent 5 years in a nursing home, paying privately for the care she received and our inheritance possibilities all suffered as a result. Conversely, she had care that we could not provide for her which was given by trained/skilled nursing professionals and she was safe and well cared for. There are tradeoffs for everything



So, what is the best solution when it comes to memory impairments? This too will vary from person to person; from different diagnoses; and the opinions of various physicians. General practitioners tend to be more "oh that's just age related forgetfulness." Whereas those who specialize in and work with folks with advanced memory issues will tell you exactly what it is and how best to deal with it. That is not a stab at GP's as they have quite a bit to deal with not being focused on one specialized area. Instead they have to look at everything, and all in 15 minutes or less, but don't get me started on that!

There are many types of memory issues such as dementia, Alzheimer's, vascular dementia and many, many more. Each one requires different help, shows different signs and symptoms; and each one progresses differently. This is why consulting a specialist sooner rather than later is the key. You want to know as best as you can exactly what you are dealing with.

The common end result is that eventually the individual's world gets very small. As does their ability to function without direction and to be safe in much more than a very small space.

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"Out of sight, out of mind." Becomes very dangerous, and the larger the available options, the more risks there are. This is one of many reasons why keeping them in their own home or adding on to your home is not the wisest of choices for the long run.

I know I just hit a nerve in a lot of you. If you think I'm nuts or don't know what I'm talking about, let me share with you about the day I came home from work and my mother had put a plastic plate in the toaster oven. When I asked her about it, she said, "Oh, I've done it before. It's fine if you take it out in time." True story! Shocking, but true.

To make the story even better she carried the hot oven rack with the melted plate on it up an entire flight a stairs to get from her kitchen to mine so she could try to pull the plate off with pliers. This was done by a woman recovering from a fractured hip that was not supposed to be going up the stairs without both hands on the rails. Now, do you see the issues and how quickly this can spiral from bad to worse? Mom didn't even have a memory impairment diagnosis at the time. Actually, she never did. I was given the "oh that's just age related forgetfulness" line when I in-

quired about it. In hindsight and after talking with another physician he said it was likely vascular dementia where a series of little explosions go off in their brain affecting random parts and abilities. All of a sudden they cannot do some random act that they always could do before.

When we initially receive the news of a diagnosis it is very scary. The person is likely very aware that they can't do things like they used to. It is hardest on them during this period because they want to be a competent and independent as they always have been. Sadly though, this is not the reality. They are declining and it will only get worse.

If you have a loved one with memory issues, go to the free information events offered by all of the memory care communities in the area. Read books, watch videos, and learn however best you can. You and your loved ones will all benefit from taking the time to find out from those of us who learned by our own mistakes how not to make them on your own.

And, as always, if there is anything I can do to help you. Please don't hesitate to reach out!

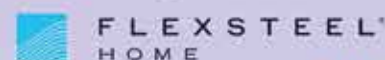
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