

Dementia Family Care-Partner Poems

**Micro stories of love, loss, resilience and living
mindfully in the dementia world**

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These poems are brief, honest reflections drawn from real lives—the voices of family care partners living alongside dementia.

They are offered to help family care-partners (caregivers) of persons with dementia:

- feel less alone,
- find language for what is hard to name,
- deepen compassion for yourself and your loved one,
- and strengthen resilience, one moment at a time.

You do not need to read the poems in order.

There is no right way to use it.

Begin wherever you feel drawn.

One Day Mindfulness Millionaire: A Lighthearted Primer for the Uninitiated by Abhilash Desai, MD, and Faith Galliano Desai, PhD. You may find this book useful.

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How to Use This Book

At first glance, this collection may feel overwhelming—especially if you are caring for someone living with dementia and experiencing severe stress.

If that's how you feel, pause.

Take a slow breath. Perhaps a few.

Now gently ask yourself:

What would help me right now?

If the answer is comfort, reassurance, or the simple relief of feeling understood, you are in the right place. These poems—brief micro-stories drawn from real lives—are meant to be taken slowly, one at a time.

You do not need to read the poems in order.

You do not need to finish the book.

There is no right way to use it.

Read one poem, if that is all you have the capacity for today. Notice whether the words resonate, soothe, or simply remind you that you are not alone.

Some poems hold joy and wonder. Others speak to grief, guilt, fear, anger, or exhaustion. All of these belong in the dementia world. Nothing here is meant to judge, fix, or instruct—only to witness, reflect, and accompany you.

Sharing stories—especially brief, honest ones—is part of narrative medicine. Through story, we make meaning, deepen compassion, and strengthen resilience.

Most importantly, be gentle with yourself.

Living alongside dementia is hard.

You are doing the best you can with what you know and the resources you have.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful for the steadfast love of my wife and my son. Without their presence— their humor, patience, encouragement, and unwavering support—I could not have fully experienced life’s beauty or endured its hardest moments.

These micro-stories and poems were written by me, drawn from years of listening closely to families living alongside dementia. They represent my effort to see the world through the eyes of family care-partners and to honor their lived realities with humility and care. I am profoundly thankful to the individuals and families who entrusted me with their stories. Their courage, honesty, and generosity made this work possible.

Sharing stories—especially brief, honest ones—is central to narrative medicine. Through story, we make meaning of suffering, deepen compassion, and strengthen resilience. These poems are offered in that spirit. Please feel free to share them; you have my permission.

This collection may also be read as a form of art. Individually, the poems capture fragments of lived experience; together, they form a fractured and often unsettling portrait of the dementia care-partner’s world. These stories reflect loss, invisibility, moral distress, and exhaustion—but also resilience, tenderness, and love. Too often, the suffering of care-partners goes unseen. My hope is that this collection helps bring their experiences into view and affirms that their stories matter.

Each of us literally chooses, by his way of attending to things, what sort of a universe he shall appear to himself to inhabit.

- William James

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Dementia Joy

Doc, living with dementia:
what an incredible,
life-affirming experience.
Zooming with family regularly.
Trying to achieve
the impossible
creatively.
Helping each other survive
through hard months
of the pandemic
barely.
Now, enjoying,
appreciating
the joy of meeting physically
hugging, kissing eagerly.
Dementia has helped me see
moral beauty,
moral courage,
and moral distress
more clearly.
Thank you
for being there
for me and my family.



Daughter of my patient who had advanced dementia and died peacefully at home after a fall, hip fracture, and hospice care. I explained the serious risks of hospitalization and surgery.

Joy and Wonder

Dawn came.
Snowing finally stopped.
Sky turned blue.
Air turned crystal clear.
A gorgeous cold morning.
Bitter cold,
healing cold,
cold that instantly stopped
all pain.
The mountains looked closer.
Majestic,
beautiful,
every detail visible.
Rocky outcrops,
pine forests,
tree lines,
snow channels.
Healing vision.
Beauty that instantly stopped
all pain
and infused me
with joy and wonder.



“Me” here is the wife of my patient who has advanced dementia and lives with him in beautiful Idaho mountains. She paints beautifully.

Thrill and Miracle in the Dementia Land

Doc, there are those rare moments
when something jolts her awake,
and I see the glimpse of her old self
back online.

She smiles
she dances
she hugs
and she remembers me.
I shudder with the thrill
of witnessing this miracle.

She then falls back into
the sleep of daily dementia life.

The great challenge,
the great triumph
is to stay mindful,
keep awake the part of you
that knows
that at any moment
of any day
the miracle,
the thrill
can happen again



Daughter of my patient with advanced dementia

Dementia & Caressing Time

Doc, her dementia has progressed
There is only present
She doesn't remember
our wonderful past memories
She doesn't worry
about her dementia progressing
You learn to slow down
A light breeze
wafting through the room
gets noticed, felt and enjoyed
It's like caressing time
Time becomes malleable
and meanders slowly
like fog drifting
through Idaho mountains
Tyranny of dementia
is also momentarily lifted
I am learning
to befriend the present,
find solace, nourishment
and underlying meaning
in ordinary moments, Doc



Daughter of my patient with advanced dementia. I am teaching her how to live mindfully with dementia

My Reflection on This Section: Joy in Dementia

Before witnessing these families, I would not have believed that joy could exist in the dementia world.

And yet, time and again, I have seen it—quiet, unexpected, and often fleeting, but real.

I have watched daughters, spouses, and partners notice beauty with heightened clarity: a smile, a breeze, a moment of recognition, a mountain morning. I have seen dementia strip life down to its essentials, and in doing so, reveal moral courage, tenderness, and love in its rawest form.

Joy in dementia does not erase suffering. It lives alongside grief, fear, and exhaustion. It appears without warning and often disappears just as quickly. But when it comes, it reminds us that meaning is still possible, even here.

I am deeply grateful to the individuals who allowed me into their lives and trusted me with their stories. They have taught me—again and again—that the dementia world, though profoundly difficult, can also be a place of grace, joy, connection, and many small and large miracles.

Patience and FTD

My whole life
felt encrypted.
I was given
the thumb drive
that would decode,
but no key.
Life then had stuck me
with a plan
to find the key.
But the plan was
full of holes
and more were appearing.
I could sense
the light of hope
being shut off.
I could feel the darkness.
I could visualize
a void around me.
I started repeating,
“Good things come
to those who wait.”
After the tenth time,
I felt my body relax.
My breathing became
slower and deeper.



Teaching mindfulness to one of my patients (in her early forties) whose husband has autosomal-dominant young-onset Fronto-Temporal Dementia (and his two brothers also have it; the fourth brother doesn't have the gene). My patient is also worried about her three children getting FTD. I introduced my patient to the International NeuroPalliative Care Society.

Enter Slow Time

Stay home.
Do nothing much.
Just for a day.
Yes, today.
Cancel all appointments.
Cancel all meetings.
No TV watching.
No news reading.
No phone calling.
No one is waiting for you.
No one is getting worried.
No one is getting mad.
Walk your neighborhood slowly.
Notice the smell.
Notice the sounds.
Notice your breathing.
Slow it down.
Enter slow time.
Watch it pass by.
Stay home.
Do nothing.
Just for a day.
Yes, today.



My patient's daughter was burned out from caregiving responsibilities. She was fortunate to find a wonderful professional caregiver who was going to stay with her mother (my patient who has advanced dementia) for the whole day.

Surrender to fear

Surrender to fear,
you say, Doc,
surrender to fear
and let ingrained instincts
take over
and lend me
strength and wisdom.
To evade doom and gloom
dementia generates,
you say,
trust my inner strengths.
That panic is energy
that will provide the force
to sprint
as well as
run a caregiving marathon.
That I learn
to find a place of rest
in the middle of shit storms
raised by the fevered conjurings
of my dementia terrorized mind.
Well, I am desperate, Doc,
so, I will trust you
and jump in.



Teaching mindfulness to a spouse care partner. Her husband has advanced dementia.

Befriending Insomnia

The street was empty
quiet
no traffic
no noise.
The midnight air
was cold,
very cold
below freezing cold
way below freezing cold
and strangely comforting,
even beautiful.
I have come
to love it.
“Insomnia is
your new friend,”
I told myself.
“You would never have
experienced a city
in winter
at midnight otherwise.”
I reminded myself,
“Be grateful.”



“I” is my patient’s daughter. My patient has moderate-stage dementia. Insomnia is one of the many “gifts” that living with dementia has given my patient’s daughter. I am teaching her one of the five invitations by Frank Ostaseski – *Welcome everything, Push away nothing*. In this case, welcoming insomnia.

My Reflection on This Section: Living Mindfully with Dementia

Mindfulness and meditation came to my rescue more than fifteen years ago, at a time when I was falling apart. Since then, they have continued to steady me through rage, fear, shame, guilt, and despair.

Over time, I have learned that mindfulness does not remove pain—it changes our relationship to it. It helps us stay present when the mind wants to flee, harden, or collapse. It teaches us how to meet suffering with steadiness rather than resistance.

Teaching mindfulness to individuals caring for people with dementia has become a central part of my work. In a world where so much feels uncontrollable, mindfulness offers caregivers a way to reclaim small islands of agency: a breath, a pause, a moment of kindness toward oneself.

Living mindfully with dementia does not make the journey easy. But it can make it more bearable, more humane, and, more often than recognized, deeply meaningful.

Young-Onset Dementia Stress

Things keep breaking, Doc
Again, and again.
Everything seems broken.
Ground is always shifting.
Light is always flickering.
Dementia doesn't seem
to stop grinding
me down.
Problems won't cease
to be born,
and I am responsible
to fix them.
My grief rises.
My strength fades.
I cling to him
and he holds me.
The moment I cease
to cling to him
and he stops holding me,
my grief will engulf me
and my strength
will give out.



Wife (age 58) of my 62-year-old patient who has young-onset dementia.

Fear of Alzheimer's

I can't sleep, Doc.
I am terrified.
Fears clawing
at my mind.
Not even my tireless schedule
gives any comfort.
Ever since my mom's diagnosis,
the Alzheimer's
that has possessed,
consumed, transformed her,
I dread
will come for me.
I can't seem to stop
thinking my thoughts.
I can't trust my mind.
I have started relying
on journals,
which I keep
with daily vigor.
Help me, Doc.
Please help me.



"I" is daughter of my patient with mild Alzheimer's dementia. The daughter is doing remarkably well after just 3 months of intensive mindfulness-based cognitive behavioral therapy.

Home Visit

“Doc, here’s your favorite tea and cookies.”

“Homemade cookies to die for,”

I replied.

She smiled.

“He is asleep.

He is better.”

“And you?”

I asked.

“Also, better.”

I raised my eyebrows.

“Our daughter is coming to help.”

Her house was on a hill.

I could see

the panoramic vista beyond and the lush green golf course below,

and in the other direction

majestic mountains

now snow-covered

with the first snow

of the season.

For the first time in months, we had a relaxed conversation.



“He” is my patient and has advanced dementia. “Better” = less agitated.

She (his wife) took my advice and reached out to their daughter for help. I do occasional home visits.

An Angel

The nurse aide
washed the sweat
from his face
with a warm, damp cloth.
Dressed him
with deft, gentle hands.
Wheeled him
down to the dining hall.
He was as light
as a bundle of rags.
The aide was determined
to put some muscle on him.
“Don’t you worry.
I will make sure,”
the aide assured
his wife of 67 years.
“Then, you both
can plan your new adventure.”
The wife smiled, turned to me,
and said,
“She is an angel.”



My patient (90 years old with advanced dementia, lost a lot of weight) and his wife loved traveling to remote places, their “adventures.”

Diagnosis of Dementia

My husband's neurologist said
he has dementia.
I had trouble breathing.
This cannot be happening, Doc.
No, No, No,
I told myself over and over
as the world around me became blurred.
I don't deserve this.
He doesn't deserve this.
We have been good people.
We are not guilty.
What do you think about
when you suddenly realize
that you have been banished
from the "land of normal"
and will never be allowed
to go "home."
The truth is
that nothing will be clear,
not for a long time.
Too many raw emotions,
random thoughts.
Too much fear and anger
to understand what is happening.
All you will hear is
No, No, No.



Wife of my patient with advanced dementia

Dementia Caregiver

On the surface,
peaceful mundane life.
No rapids, no waterfalls.
Quiet windless Wednesday.
Mail carrier adeptly sorting mail.
Ninety percent junk mail
destined to be tossed away unopened.
Inwardly, struggling to stay afloat
Listening to Khalil Gibran's book
The Prophet.
The world suddenly
comes to a halt
I couldn't move,
My body numb
I was shaken
to the core of my being.
I had suddenly, somehow
reached an understanding
that emanates from
the deepest, darkest recesses
of one's being.
No criticism,
just understanding.
Understanding that
what I am experiencing
is deep powerlessness,
absolute impotence,
formless, weightless impotence.
Understanding that unless
I accept this pain
I will not experience warmth.



Husband of my patient with advanced dementia

What Am I Going to Do?

“I am afraid
I have bad news.
Your husband has FTD,
Fronto-Temporal Dementia.
He is still unconscious.”
“What am I going to do?
We have four young kids.”
“You are going to take
one step at a time,
one day at a time,
one hour at a time,
one minute at a time,
one second at a time.”
“OK.”
“Starting now.”
“OK.
He was a good husband,
a good father.”
I nodded.
“First thing,
you need help.
Who can I call for you?”
“Jenny, my sister.
Button 3 on my phone.”
I dialed.



My patient is her husband, who was in a car crash, driving rashly due to FTD. FTD had changed his personality and made him mean, impulsive, and socially inappropriate. He was misdiagnosed as having Bipolar mania.

She is doing better with awesome support from sister, parents, spiritual community, dementia team, excellent disability insurance, and caregiver support groups.

Sheer Terror

I was mumbling
in indecipherable shrinkspeak
as I tried to
crawl out
of a state of stunned disbelief.
My thoughts
a mush of rampant flashes.
My inner debates
raging over strategies
that changed by the minute.
Tears started to roll out.
Tears not of sorrow
but of sheer terror.
My stomach flipped.
I wanted to throw up.
My body shook
to my toes as
my heart raced away.
Where are you, Mom?
Where have you
wandered off to?



The plight of a psychiatrist caregiver whose mother (my patient) has dementia and had wandered away from home. After two longest hours of the daughter's sheer terror, my patient was found, safe and sound, several blocks away.

Let the Tears Flow

I let the tears flow
this time, without wiping them away.
“No,” I thought.
I’m not that lonely.
I have my husband with me
even though
he can’t remember me,
his wife of 44 years.
I tell myself
there are two of us
looking up at the heavens,
praying for joy to appear,
reassuring myself,
searching for joy,
providing my husband with nourishment.
Those are my duties now.
This dementia has put
shackles on my heart.
Despair Anger Fear.
I try to be hospitable.
even to these visiting forces
that constantly threaten
to overwhelm me.
Today
I will let the tears flow
without wiping them away.



Wife of my patient with advanced dementia. Individual counseling is often not the answer. Community, family and friends and pets there in person to help the person with dementia and the care partner and to laugh together besides wiping the tears is the answer.

Unthinkable Future

“Sorry. I am being rude
Talking about you
in front of you.”
My patient who has dementia
was pacing.
She plunked herself
into the chair
and tucked her hair
behind her ears.
Her husband’s health was
declining rapidly.
He had no words.
His soul felt too heavy.
His wife in an ALF.
That future was unthinkable
at this moment
and untenable
when it arrived.
His body revealed nothing
of his psychic wounds,
wounds that ran deep
and felt permanent.
“Ah, assisted living facility
A place of boundless tranquility,”
he quipped.
I responded,
“Humor is a good start,
but we need more than a strong heart.
No one can predict the future.
Let’s live in the possibility
that there is an alternate destiny.
Let’s focus on getting you
back to healthy.”

Taking care of family care-partners is sometimes even more urgent than taking care of the patient with dementia. ALF = assisted living facility / community

Anything but Dementia

Her clothes were brighter
than a field of wildflowers
with rich reds
and sunny yellows.
Countless shades of
green and blue
deep blacks
and gray and purple.
I had never seen
such colorful elegance before.
We sat on a bench outside,
all bundled up.
The air had begun to grow cold.
She liked sitting here.
The sun dipped below
the tops of the trees.
We watched a dragonfly
move lazily among the reeds.
“Why would they
name it dragonfly?
It looks nothing
like a dragon.”
We chatted about
this and that.
And more this
and more that.
Anything but
her husband’s dementia,
her struggles in keeping him home,
his hallucinations,
his anger,
her guilt preventing her
from asking her only son
for help,
her fears about the future, and her grief.



This is wife of my patient with advanced dementia. Often, to help family care-partners, it is okay to not talk about fears and guilt they are experiencing.

My World

I am a dementia caregiver.
My world is desolate.
Not a single living soul,
not a bird,
not a fly.
Where waves roar
for no one in particular.
Where all events
are beyond comprehension.
Not a single logical thought,
just reflections and reverie.
Sinister at times
and yet
also filled with desire
to look forever
at the monotonous movements
of the ocean waves.
A prisoner
of my own meditations,
engulfed
by an overwhelming sense of powerlessness,
facing
an inescapably bitter fate.



It is important to provide safe place for family care-partners to share their dark mood and thoughts. Just being present and listening mindfully (with compassion) can be healing and hope generating.

Evening Loneliness

Evening came
without you.
It will leave
without any of my pain.

Another evening
no you.
Evening will leave
without taking my angst.

Evening came,
so came tears.
Evening will leave,
but tears won't.

Someday
evening will stop coming.
Till then,
I will keep hoping.

That one day, evening
will bring you along
and leave
with my loneliness.



Loneliness experienced by many spouses of people who have dementia. Here, “you” could be anyone – God, friend, family.

Moving in with Mom

My patient
descended the hill quietly,
the quiet broken
only by a distant
murmur of the river,
the chirping of magpies,
and the clacking
of her sandals.
A hawk was circling
high above,
dark against a blue sky,
while below
was her dog Brownie.
A stone bounced
down the slope
disturbed by the
passing paws.
When she reached
her car,
she took a deep breath
and called her brother.
“I am moving in
with Mom.”
“Why? She will be fine.
She will make it
in that ALF we visited.”
“I won’t be fine.
I won’t make it.”



My patient’s mother (also my patient) has dementia and cannot stay alone safely. Her brother, she, and I talked about realities of living in an ALF in our Covid world.

Your Mother Needs You More

My patient did not want to
leave her father.
“Your mother needs you more.
Your dad is safe here,”
I told her.
What could she do
but accede,
praying that her father
would live until
she returns.
Leave taking was hard.
He did not even know
her name when she came
to say farewell.
She kissed him
on the brow
and told him
his little daughter was well.
“I am terrified.
I don’t want him
to be alone
when he passes away.”
“He won’t be,”
the nurse assured her.



My patient’s father died peacefully in the nursing home with the nurse by his side.
His wife also had dementia and could not be left alone at home.

Make Amends

Nothing is more vivid
than the fact
that you have no respect
for yourself.

By being
what you have become,
by placing others
always
above yourself,
you broke
your own heart
early
and drove yourself
away.

Time to make amends.

Today.

Now.

Make amends
with yourself.

It is not too late.

Never too late
to make amends.



My 66-year-old patient with childhood trauma from his father's abusive behaviors when drunk, now caring for him - father has advanced dementia.

With trauma-focused therapy and mindfulness, he has come a long way.

The New 90

She was 90
going on 60.
Sharp as a tack.
Slender, upright.
Showed me pictures
of her immaculate garden.
Looked way younger
than I was expecting,
even after being warned
by her daughter.
“How’s my daughter doing, Doc?
How bad is she?”
“Your daughter
is doing well,
surprisingly well,
although after meeting you
I am not surprised.”
She smiled.
“So my son-in-law
is not doing well.”
I nodded.



My patient’s son-in-law has advanced dementia and was having severe hallucinations. The title of the poem indicates how many in their 80s and 90s are witnessing dementia in younger family members.

God's Helper

"What is happening to me, Doc?

I have been shouting
followed by a sudden flush
of shame.

I am so tired.

My head hurts all the time."

"You have the flu
and caregiver burnout."

"Any medicine?"

I again shook my head.

My 82-year-old patient
had grown thin and frail
but I could still feel
the warmth of life
through her skin
as I held her hand.

Her voice was full of
melancholy and despair.

"You will not die.

In fact, you will get better.

The worst is over,"

I said.

For the first time
she smiled a little.

"You are too optimistic, Doc."

As I left her,

I wondered how in the world
is she going to turn around?



My patient's husband has advanced dementia. She visited her husband in the nursing home every day. She did turn around, thanks to our wonderful social worker, who did home visits and regularly took her outdoors to feed the squirrels. She felt she now had a purpose, as she was one of "God's helpers."

You Are a Good Son

I hit the road
headed east,
no clear destination.
Dawn happened
an hour into my drive.
The sky moved from dark
to gray
to purple
to gorgeous orange.
“Hello, sun.”
Cruising at 80 miles an hour.
Started music,
Sheryl Crow music,
“Everyday is a winding road.”
My favorite way
to settle myself.
“You are a good son.
Mom died peacefully.
She is not suffering any more.
You took good care of her.
You are a good son.
Feeling guilty is normal.
There is always more
one could have done.
You are a good son,”
I kept repeating.
I kept repeating.



“I” here is my patient’s son. He was truly a good son, and I told him so when I gave him the news. He took wonderful care of her for 6 years. She had advanced dementia.

Mom, Hang in There

I perhaps gave him
no real choice.
Traffic was light,
the journey long.
The world outside
dark quiet
cold sleepy.
His heart also quiet
afraid, gloomy.
He drove fast
stopped for gas
bought a stale sandwich
that was made
a year ago.
Forced it down
as he hustled
to the hospital
seven hours away.
“Mom, hang in there.
I am coming.
Hang in there.”



I told my patient's son that his mother has advanced dementia, fell and fractured her wrist badly, has osteoporosis, and can't be discharged home. He came and took her home with home health. They both are doing okay now.

Severe Attitude

He was dressed plainly
Attitude severe
Perspective unadorned
Views out of date
Emotional state gloomy.
“That’s Dad.
He doesn’t know
how to help Mom,”
his daughter said.
I nodded.
My heart went out
for him.



This is my 80-year-old patient. His wife has advanced dementia. His daughter is a total opposite of him, full of positive energy.

Predawn Walk

It was cold,
windy.
The wind was bringing
snow clouds.
I could feel it.
I could smell it.
I turned up my collar,
crossed my arms
over my chest,
trapped my hands
under my biceps.
I looked up:
Full moon
Perfect
A new day
Empty
Unsullied.
I began my brisk,
superlong,
dailyish
predawn walk.
My life-saving
“medical” intervention.
Life had become
incredibly stressful
since March 2020
with no relief
in sight.
Maybe today
will be
a good day.



“I” is my advanced dementia patient’s son. Maybe life will give him a break and relief will arrive in some form that he or I can’t yet imagine.

Sudden Dementia

“What should I do, Doc?”

“Take a walk

right now

alone

for as long

as you need.

Your sister can stay here.

Walking by yourself

will help.

Get some fresh mountain air.

See the trees.

See the sky.

Then come back.

We will chat.”

She nodded

and left

with tears

in her eyes.

She took two hours

to come back.



A massive stroke due to congenital vascular malformation leading to intracranial bleeding caused her husband to have severe aphasia and dementia. He is just 64. She is just 60. Two awesome kids. One awesome sister. She is slowly doing better.

Lola

Lola is Ms. M's baby doll.

Lola is soft,

squishy,

the right size

to wipe away

Ms. M's tears.

Lola was initially

salmon-pink

with blue plastic eyes.

Now, a little grayish

and faded

with one ear stiff

from all the wiping

of tears.

Ms. M would wrap her

in her favorite

woolen scarf.

Ms. M would never

go to bed

without Lola.



Ms. M had severe dementia and lived in a memory care home. Doll "therapy" had brought her great joy. Ms. M has left us, and her daughter now cherishes Lola and the dried tears.

Past is in the past

“Meet my mom, Doc.”

Her mom was
tall, with pinched nose,
grey-hair
hollow cheeks.

Walking gingerly.

Later on, I reassured
the daughter.

“Don’t chastise yourself.

Past is in the past.

What has happened
has happened

No one can turn back
the clock.

She is with you now.

Rejoice in that fact.

Only the present
is certain.

You have rescued her.

You are a wonderful daughter.”



My patient was going through lot of caregiver guilt. Her mother had dementia, living alone, and had been losing weight and rapidly aging for several months. It took that long for my patient to bring her permanently to live with her.

Church happy

It was thrilling, Doc.
People streaming in
Seeing so many at worship
To feel bodies all around
I am part of this fabric
Not just a thread
Familiar phrases of Eucharist
was delicious to hear.
I began to cry, Doc.
Silently,
clutching the Bible
that once belonged to my mother.
Tears of joy.



She was my patient's wife. She hadn't been to church for two years due to Covid and caregiving stress. Husband had advanced dementia and would get severely agitated without her. Eventually she agreed for me to give him anti-anxiety meds and their daughter to be with him while she attended church.

Rageful inspiration

You offer
intentional calm persuasion, Doc,
I offer rageful inspiration.
There will be
a revolt,
a spark
will birth a flame
will ignite a fire.
385 million annual salary
of Oak Street CEO.
More than a million a day!
Salve Lucrum for
Big Pharma, Health Insurance giants
and Mega Healthcare Systems.
I am drowning
in medical debt
along with at least 50 million
of my brethren.
How many died last year
because they skipped
doctor visits?
How many this year
will face the dilemma
of feeding their family
or getting medical care?



My patient's son after I told him that the annual cost of the new Alzheimer's medication Lecanemab is \$26K plus \$65K to administer and monitor. In return his mother's dementia will progress 4.5 months slower assuming no adverse brain bleeding from the drug. He speaks with hard, inarguable authority.

Salve Lucrum = Hail Profits
\$26K = 26,000 dollars

Imaginary daughter

My husband
doesn't talk to me,
doesn't go out
for walks with me,
laugh with me.

I make up
an imaginary daughter,
who visits me,
helps me,
goes out
for shopping with me,
laughs and cries with me.

I envy couples my age
laughing,
holding hands,
walking,
chatting,
hugging.

My husband
doesn't hug me.

I make up
an imaginary daughter
who hugs me,
until I stop crying.



My patient's husband has advanced dementia with severe apathy. They don't have any children. She is doing better, thanx to her wonderful friends and spiritual community.

Tears Finally Came

Tears finally came, Doc.
Tears finally came.
A year has passed.
I miss him.
Miss his smile,
Miss his hugs.
He was a hugger, Doc,
till the end.
There is a gaping sinkhole
in my heart.
Everyone thinks
I am doing well,
and I am,
but with a lot of effort
and intentionality.
We grounded each other,
did everything together.
Living with his dementia
was stressful
but meaningful.
There was purpose
and enough joy
and laughter.
I miss him.
Enough about me.
How are you doing, Doc?



Nightly forest songs

Being in the forest,
listening to its nightly songs
of creaking branches,
wind-twisted rustling of leaves,
skitter of unseen creatures
under the moonlight,
makes me happy.
Dementia stole my wife, Doc,
memory first,
then speech,
and finally, her body.
She loved this forest.
Now, I find her
in its nightly songs.
Without the songs,
evenings get grim
and my mood grimmer.
And now,
with branches heavy
with first snow of winter,
nightly forest songs
are pure joy, Doc.
Pure joy.



My patient died a few months ago. Her husband keeps in touch with me.

Last Rodeo

“You are furious, Doc.
Why?”
I looked away.
My patient had
an uncanny ability
to read people’s emotions.
A skill honed to survive childhood,
family full of addiction
and mental illness.
Her skill to intuit
hopes and insecurities
felt supernatural.
“Yes, I am furious.
Your husband was
in restraints, again, last night.
I have adjusted meds
and care plan.”
She patted my hand.
I patted her hand.
This wasn’t our first rodeo.
We prayed
it would be our last.



Fortunately, our prayers were answered. My patient’s husband (also my patient) with advanced dementia stayed at relatively mild levels of agitation in the hospital that could be easily managed without restraints, and was safely discharged to an assisted living facility where he continues to do okay.

My team at our memory center is trying to get the hospital to become “age-friendly and dementia-friendly.” Miles to go before we sleep 😞

Guns & Dementia

Windless night air,
cloudless sky
with bright disc
of full moon.
And yet,
she couldn't stop pacing,
just couldn't settle.
Started at every sound,
expecting the gun to go off
at any moment.
She felt dread,
more dread than ever.
Peace officer was wonderful.
Her husband gave his gun
and left for ED
with surprising ease.
Her pulse finally calmed.
It still seems incredible to her
that crisis resolved
this easily.



My patient, her husband has dementia related psychosis and is now doing better on an antipsychotic medication. He was threatening to shoot imaginary intruders. Peace officer was empathetic, calm and very skilled in de-escalation skills.

ED = Emergency Department

Life's horrors

Time often becomes
a malleable substance
in the thick of sorrow.
Some of life's horrors unfold
at a blink of an eye.
The hour was late,
the sky, a star speckled black.
The night possessed
of a bone-cutting chill
unique to Idaho mountains.
A gust of icy air
made him wince.
First Parkinson's,
now stroke.
Psychosis and dementia
just around the corner.
Life's horror
unfolding
at a blink
of an eye.



My 79-year-old patient sitting outside his mountain cabin. Life was also merciful to him and answered his prayers. Sudden cardiac death spared him from what he dreaded most, psychosis and dementia. His wife and two children were keenly aware that life had become a prolonged torture of constant trepidation interspersed with moments of terror for him.

My patient had told me a thousand times how blessed and fortunate he has been all his life with awesome partner, children, friends, physical and mental health and work life; that he hated goodbyes, and he was ready to call it a day.

Overcoming rage

Cloudless blue sky
and gentle breeze
did nothing
to diminish his rage,
rage clear and true,
implacably commanding,
a strident mirror
of mountain's silent
but addictive solicitation.
It thrust open the door
and demanded he enter.
Overwhelming grief and guilt
if he refused.
Thoughts full of rage
increased in fervor
and volume.
He continued to climb.
It took a tediously prolonged interval
of hiking and sweating
to get him
into a semblance of control
of his rage



My patient with mild dementia died in the hospital due to a medical error and hospital refused to acknowledge their error. His son is devastated. His calm, cool and collected wife and rigorous hiking prevented him from losing it.

Karma

“What was his sin, Doc
to merit this?”

Clear summer sky.

Beautiful classical music
in the background.

My 78-year-old patient,
a military veteran,
had 50 years of MS,
advanced lymphoma
and 4 years of
Lewy Body Dementia.

His wife of 52 years
and I sat in silence
looking out the window
of her living room.

“What was your sin
to merit this?”

I asked her.

She smiled.

A singularly charming smile.

“I have my roses.”

We stepped outside,
taking in the soft evening air,
to be with her roses.

Heavy-headed roses blooming
in the mass of greenery.



MS = multiple sclerosis

Wife’s dedication and hard care partnering along with our dementia care team guidance (including three psychiatric meds) helped keep him at home. He started losing weight, not sleeping and white cells were creeping upwards. We recommended hospice.

Dementia and Losses

Losses keep coming, Doc
Lacerations to my heart
keep occurring
My dad was just placed
in a personal care home
This has helped my mom
But
I am razed to the bone
of my resilience, Doc
Even a video chat
with my hero
is becoming unbearable
leaving me bereft of
solid ground



Daughter of my patient with advanced dementia. She found the book I recommended by Pema Chodron, "When things fall apart," very helpful. She is doing better. To me, daughter is the hero in this story.

There is no love of life without despair of life.

Albert Camus

Only to the extent that we expose ourselves over and over to annihilation can that which is indestructible be found in us.

Pema Chodron

My Reflections on This Section: Care-Partner Stress

Family members caring for someone with dementia endure extraordinary levels of stress, grief, and guilt. Much of this suffering is invisible, carried privately, and often not understood—by others and by caregivers themselves.

What I have learned is that people do not always need solutions. They need to be heard and understood. They need their pain acknowledged without judgment or urgency to fix it. They need someone to have compassion for them, to really care.

Listening—deeply listening—to a caregiver’s story can be deeply healing. Presence, compassion, and validation when authentic and spontaneous, can restore a sense of dignity and reduce the crushing isolation so many caregivers experience.

These reflections are offered not to explain away suffering, but to honor it. To say: your pain makes sense, and you are not alone.

What a Guy!

Hardscrabble childhood.
No money, no frills.
Dad working three jobs.
Mom, the pillar
of strength.
Running water
a luxury.
Shoes rare.
A square meal
cause for celebration.
Fast forward:
college,
doctorate,
wife and kids,
school superintendent,
three books published.
Wife has dementia.
He wants to be
a good caregiver.
What a guy!



Recipe for Success

“How do you do it?”

I asked her.

“Discipline, creativity,
and machinelike consistency,”
she answered.

Her success matched
the roaring optimism
of her personality.

I had never witnessed anything
like this level of
the caregiving success
in a family
living with dementia.

Her husband had
advanced dementia

She was happy.

He was happy.

24 months in a row.

24 months since his diagnosis.

I was simply
amazed and baffled.

Discipline, creativity,
and machinelike consistency.

A recipe for success.



Devoted Granddaughter

“I will move in
and take care of her, Doc.
Mom is overwhelmed
and doesn’t have the patience.
Grammy raised me
with love and patience
while my parents worked.
Grammy is an artist, Doc.
I don’t have those skills
but I have her eye.
My art collection
is a testimony,
you will see.
But you will see
a more literal resemblance.
See this picture
of Grammy
when she was young?”
“Looking at it is like –”
“Looking in a mirror,”
I finished her sentence.



My 82-year-old patient had advanced dementia.

Glorious Morning

Christmas morning
Just before dawn
Bitter winds
Fat lazy flakes
An inch of snow
on the ground
Snowing got harder
Air got colder
Wind got wilder
My kind of weather
Glorious morning
Not a soul out walking
or driving
Perfect
Two inches of snow
now on the ground
Beautiful
Merry Christmas
I greeted myself
Headed back home
My lovely wife
asleep still
and hot chocolate
waiting for me



My patient's husband loves his morning walks before his wife (who has advanced dementia) wakes up.

90, going on 50

Large bald head.
90, going on 50
Dark green eyes
dancing with curiosity
and missing nothing.
Both of us
sitting on a bench,
watching the world pass by.
A heavy truck passed by
vibrating the dirty asphalt pavement
underneath.
“I close my eyes
and I can watch
the ocean churn
and spill toward the shore
and take me.
After I have had
rum and coke, Doc.
After I have had
two rum and coke.”
He chuckled.
“You like run and coke, Doc?”
He was amazing.
90, going on 50.



He was husband of my patient with dementia. He died within three months of his wife’s passing away. Loved her dearly. He didn’t have heart disease or any other health issues. Healthier than most 50-year-olds I know. He was relieved that he didn’t die before his wife. I was relieved that he did not die before my patient. My patient had high quality of life until the end solely because of his love and attention to details in caring. What a guy!

Ms. Alabama

I am from Alabama, Doc.
Fried chicken, boiled collards
and baked corn bread.
Eat until
you can hardly breathe.

Small mass-produced apartment
has been transformed
into a warm home.
Behind her warmth
is deep sadness.
A cloud
that hangs
like a thick fog,
that will not go away.

Doc, sometimes I feel
that he is vanishing
rapidly into the black hole
of dementia.



Wife of my patient with advanced dementia. I call her Ms. Alabama. Internal humor between her and I. Her wicked sense of humor, cooking for others and singing gospel songs is what keeps her going.

My Reflections on This Section: Care-Partner Resilience

Time and again, I am blown away by the resilience of family members caring for loved ones with dementia.

Their strength is rarely loud or dramatic. It shows up in persistence, creativity, humor, and an unwavering commitment to love, even as losses accumulate.

Resilience does not mean the absence of despair. It means continuing to care despite it. Many caregivers find ways—sometimes fragile, sometimes fierce—to adapt, to rest when possible, and to rediscover purpose in the midst of profound uncertainty.

Bearing witness to this resilience has been one of the great privileges of my work.

Dignified death

Gaze distant and unfocused,
she laughed,
a rueful and bitter laugh.
“So, to avoid
a life of dementia,
he took his own life, Doc,”
she said, after a moment
of brief, somber reflection.
“He did not deserve
to die like that, Doc.
Even dogs receive more respect.”
This truth felt icier
than midwinter Idaho mountain air.
Dignified death,
what many want
and our health care systems
do not,
cannot,
will not
give.



Wife of my 75-year-old patient who recently got diagnosed with early Alzheimer's. He died one month after diagnosis, after he found out he could not get help from our health system for assisted dying.

Pause and Reflect

The two poems that follow speak to moments when suffering feels unbearable. Please pause as needed and reflect. Care for yourself as you read.

Dementia and Suicide

“Why did he kill himself?
Why, Doc? Why?”
“He was a Marine.
He had a code:
unit, corps, God, country.
Not being able
to live independently
was too much.
He didn’t want
to be a burden
to his unit,
his family,
to you.
He tried to,
he really did.
He pushed back suicide
for days
agonizing.
He was just a person
who couldn’t take any more,
and in the end
he did not betray
what he believed in.”
The daughter started crying.
I said it again
in different order
with different emphases.
It did not help.
She kept crying.



Support from her family and friends and daughters of other veterans is helping.

My Reflections on This Section: Suicide and Dementia

Witnessing the suffering of individuals living with dementia—and those who love them—has been among the most emotionally and spiritually gut-wrenching aspect of my work.

Some patients confront fears so overwhelming that they begin to question whether life remains bearable. Sitting with these thoughts, without turning away, requires deep trust and courage—from patients and clinicians alike.

I am humbled by those who have entrusted me with their darkest thoughts and most private fears. Their honesty has taught me that despair does not mean failure, and that speaking about suicidal thoughts can be an act of profound vulnerability.

These stories are shared with care and intention—to acknowledge suffering, to honor truth, and to remind us of the urgent need for compassion, presence, and systemic change.

Resources, Mindfulness and Meditations, a Letter and Blessings

My Intention for This Section

No family care-partner should have to walk the dementia journey alone. And yet, so many do—quietly, privately, and with immense courage. This section is offered as a place of support, companionship, and gentle refuge for those moments when the weight feels too heavy to carry by yourself.

The resources shared here are not meant to overwhelm or instruct. They are offerings—paths that others have found helpful. You do not need to explore all of them. Choose what feels supportive right now, and feel free to leave the rest. Needing help is not a failure; it is a sign of strength, wisdom, and humanity.

Mindfulness and meditation have fundamentally changed my own relationship with suffering and living. They have not removed pain from my life, but they have helped me meet pain with greater patience, kindness, and steadiness. Over time, they have shifted my orientation toward living—away from urgency and self-judgment, and toward compassion, forgiveness, and presence. The simple practices shared here are offered in that same spirit. Think of them as brief pauses—small islands of calm you can return to, even on the most difficult days.

The meditations included are intentionally simple and accessible. They do not require special training, spiritual beliefs, or long periods of silence. Even a few minutes can help settle the nervous system and create a bit of space around fear, worry, and exhaustion. There is no right way to do them. Showing up, even imperfectly, is enough.

The letter is written from the imagined heart of a person living with dementia. It is meant to remind you—when doubt, guilt, or fatigue cloud your vision—that your presence matters. That your love is felt, even when it cannot be expressed. That your sacrifices are seen, even when they go unacknowledged.

The blessings are offered from a place of deep respect for the emotional, physical, and moral labor of caregiving. They are not meant to sanctify suffering or demand endurance. Rather, they are wishes—for protection, wisdom, self-compassion, and the ability to recognize the quiet beauty that exists within you, even now.

Above all, this section is an invitation to be gentle with yourself. Living alongside dementia is extraordinarily hard. You are doing the best you can with what you know and the resources you have. May these offerings help you feel supported, less alone, and more deeply connected—to yourself, to others, and to what still gives life meaning.

Namaste

Resources for Care Partners

Living alongside dementia is not something anyone should have to do alone. The following resources are offered to support you with **education, practical guidance, emotional validation, and community**. You do not need to explore all of them. Choose what feels helpful right now.

Podcasts: Education, Support, and Lived Experience

These podcasts are especially helpful for family and professional care partners seeking practical guidance, emotional reassurance, and a sense of companionship on difficult days.

- **Teepa Snow, OTR/L**
Dementia Care Partner Talk Show
Practical, compassionate guidance from one of the most trusted voices in dementia care.
- **Dr. Natali Edmonds, PsyD**
Dementia Careblazers
Clear, empowering education focused on helping caregivers feel more confident and less alone.
- **UCI MIND Institute**
Spotlight on Care: Alzheimer's Caregiving
Evidence-based information combined with real-world caregiving perspectives.
- **Dr. Anne Kenny, MD** (Produced by CaringKind)
Caregiver Storyteller
Honest stories that validate the emotional complexity of caregiving.
- **Dr. Mia Yang, MD (Geriatrician)**
Ask Dr. Mia: Navigating Dementia Caregiving
Short, accessible discussions addressing common caregiving challenges.
- **Banner Health**
Dementia Untangled
Recommended episode: *Caregiving Through Late-Stage Dementia* (11/6/24)
A compassionate exploration of the profound impact caregivers have in advanced dementia.

- **Dr. Nathaniel Chin, MD**
Dementia Matters – February 11, 2025, episode on **Lorenzo’s House**
A moving discussion about community, connection, and younger-onset dementia.
-

Websites and Community Resources

- **Lorenzo’s House** – *Bringing light to younger-onset dementia*
www.lorenzoshouse.org
A powerful community for individuals and families affected by younger-onset dementia.
 - **Alzheimer’s Association**
www.alz.org
Comprehensive education, a 24/7 helpline, support groups, and local resources.
-

Books

- **Travelers to Unimaginable Lands: Stories of Dementia, the Caregiver, and the Human Brain**
Dasha Kiper, PhD
A deeply humane exploration of the caregiver experience.
- **Day-to-Day Living with Dementia: A Mayo Clinic Guide for Offering Care and Support**
Angela Lunde, MA
Practical, clear guidance grounded in clinical expertise and compassion.

Free, High-Quality Apps for Relaxation, Meditation & Mindfulness

These apps are **free, evidence-informed**, and widely used in clinical, academic, and caregiving settings. They are especially helpful for family care-partners who need **short, accessible practices** during emotionally demanding days. You do not need prior meditation experience to use them.

Healthy Minds Program

Developed by the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Center for Healthy Minds

A science-based mindfulness and well-being app grounded in decades of neuroscience research. The app focuses on four core skills: **Awareness, Connection, Insight, and Purpose**. Sessions are brief and flexible, making them practical for overwhelmed caregivers.

- Completely free, no ads or required subscription
- Guided meditations and short podcast-style lessons
- One of my favorite recommendations for caregivers

UCLA Mindful

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC)

A free, high-quality mindfulness app created by UCLA Health. It offers a large library of guided meditations, including options specifically for people living with stress, illness, grief, and caregiving strain.

- Free and openly accessible
- Beginner-friendly with clear guidance
- Meditations available in multiple languages
- Includes short practices, longer sessions, and a meditation timer

How to Use These Apps

- Try **one short session** (even 3–5 minutes)
- Use them during moments of waiting, overwhelm, or emotional overload
- There is no “right” way—consistency matters more than duration
- If meditation feels difficult, that is normal; simply showing up counts

Mindfulness: My personal journey

I met Mindfulness around two decades ago. One of my new colleagues, a wonderful nurse practitioner, introduced me to Mindfulness, specifically the writings of Pema Chodron, a Buddhist teacher. I had just moved to a new city in a new state, and in a new job as a psychiatrist. I also knew that I needed to make a certain number of RVUs (Relative Value Units – translates into certain number of patients to be seen per day) so that I can have the income I wanted to not only try to ensure a good life for my lovely wife and my wonderful son, but also to send money to my loving parents in India and my parents-in-law. I was also going through personal health challenges. As a result, I was experiencing lot of existential angst. I felt my emotional state was dire, and I was desperate for a way out. I knew intellectually that I had a lot of things to be grateful for, but my day-to-day experience was that of heart ache, sadness, anger, resentment, guilt, shame, disappointment in myself, fear of disappointing my family, and dread of the future.

I started reading and listening to Pema Chodron as one final attempt to help myself before I sought professional help. Pema Chodron's teachings had an amazing effect on me from day one. I was so desperate that I did just about anything and everything she suggested and adopted her perspectives on what causes suffering. Slowly but surely, I started experiencing periods of calm, self-confidence and hope. Most importantly, my relationship with myself started improving rapidly. I started giving myself a break and my self-compassion improved quite a bit. I began to understand what I was going through, and possible root causes of my angst. One of Pema Chodron's quotes that I kept going to again and again for spiritual nourishment and strength is as follows:

Only to the extent that we expose ourselves over and over to annihilation can that which is indestructible in us be found. – Pema Chodron

Soon the universe of Mindfulness introduced me to the one and only, Thich Nhat Hanh. I started devouring his books and teachings and deepened my practice of Mindfulness. One of his short poems speaks directly to my soul. He had written this poem right after he heard about the bombing of Ben Tre during the Vietnam war, and the comment made by an American military man, "We had to destroy the town in order to save it."

For Warmth by Thich Nhat Hanh

*I hold my face between my hands.
No, I am not crying.
I hold my face between my hands
to keep my loneliness warm —
two hands protecting,
two hands nourishing,
two hands to prevent
my soul from leaving me
in anger.*

Since then, Mindfulness and Meditation (I call them MnMs J) have become my friends whom I visit every day and hang out with them as much as I can. Without MnMs, I would not have come out of the Pandemic tragedy spiritually stronger. Heck, I would not have survived, let alone overcome Moral Injury that I experienced during the Pandemic (one of the most heart wrenching experiences in my life, the aftermath of which I am still experiencing in the background). MnMs have helped me notice and experience so much of the beauty and joy that life has to offer. My favorite poet John O'Donohue shares such beauty and joy in his poems. Here is one of the many of his poems that stops me in my tracks every time I mindfully read it.

*“You have traveled too fast over false ground;
Now your soul has come to take you back.*

*Take refuge in your senses, open up
To all the small miracles you rushed through.*

*Become inclined to watch the way of rain
When it falls slow and free.*

*Imitate the habit of twilight,
Taking time to open the well of color
That fostered the brightness of day.*

*Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you.”
— John O'Donohue*

Namaste

Instructions for Living with Dementia

Dear dementia family care partner,
my friend
Instructions for living are simple

Pay attention
Be amazed
by the small and big ways
your loved one with dementia
surprises you
with their resilience and creativity
Tell others about it
This instruction
is from poet Mary Oliver

Live every day
as if it was your first day
where you look at everything
with wonder
you feel it's magic and mystery,
and live everyday
as if it's your last day
and every moment
will become poignant
This instruction
is from the Christian mystic
brother David Steindl-Rast

Live with five invitations
First invitation is - "Don't wait"
to forgive unconditionally
when your loved one with dementia
is angry at you
to love unconditionally
Second - "Give your whole being
your mind-body-soul

to each experience”
Be fully present
Third - “welcome everything
push away nothing”
including welcoming
pain and difficult emotions
Fourth - “find a place of rest
in the middle of the storm”
as storms can be
a frequent affair
in the dementia land
Fifth - “cultivate
a *don't know* mind”
Be comfortable with not knowing
These instructions are from
Zen teacher Frank Ostaseski

Deer dementia family care partner,
Dear friend,
Instructions for living are simple
Follow them
and peace will be yours,
happiness will come and go
but joy that comes
only from living deeply
in the dementia land
will be yours

You are not alone
I am with you
now and always
your soul dost
your spiritual friend

Namaste 🙏

“Dost” means friend in Hindi language

STOP • Smile • GO

A brief pause for overwhelmed moments

This is a short, simple practice you can return to anytime you feel overwhelmed, anxious, rushed, or emotionally flooded. It takes just a few minutes. There is no right way to do it. Doing it imperfectly still counts.

S — Stop

Pause whatever you are doing.
If possible, close your eyes—or soften your gaze.

You are not quitting.
You are allowing yourself a brief moment of care.

T — Take slow breaths

Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your belly.

Take **10 slow, gentle breaths**, allowing:

- your **belly to rise** on the inhale
- your **exhale to be longer** than your inhale

You may breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, or in whatever way feels most comfortable.

If counting helps, count each breath.
If your mind wanders, gently return to the next breath—without judgment.

O — Observe

Notice the movement beneath your hands.
Chest rising and falling.
Belly softening and releasing.

You do not need to change anything.
Simply observe what is already happening.

P — Pause

Let go of deliberate breathing.
Allow your breath to return to its natural rhythm.

Rest here for a moment.

Smile

Offer a gentle smile—to yourself, to the moment, or to the universe.
A real smile or a fake smile are equally welcome.

Smiling, even briefly, can soften the nervous system.

G — Gratitude

Silently acknowledge your breath:

Hello, breath.

Thank you for staying with me.

Thank you for helping me settle.

O — Go

When you are ready, open your eyes.
Return to what you were doing—bringing this small steadiness with you.

Why this helps

Slow, mindful breathing can:

- calm stress hormones

- slow heart rate
- reduce blood pressure
- support immune function
- strengthen the brain's capacity for regulation and perspective

Even a few minutes can make a meaningful difference.

How often

- Try once an hour on easier days
- Use more often, or for longer, on difficult days
- There is no quota and no failure

Showing up—even briefly—is enough.



Inspired by mindfulness-based stress reduction and the work of Zev Schuman-Olivier, MD.

Worry Basket Meditation

Welcome to the Worry Basket Meditation, a guided visualization adapted from a Harvard University handout on managing anxiety and fear. While worry is a normal response to stress, persistent worry is rarely helpful. This meditation offers a structured way to acknowledge concerns and create mental space to focus on what is within your control.

During this exercise, your mind may wander. This is natural. When you notice it, gently redirect your attention back to the meditation without judgment.

Preparation

Find a comfortable position, seated or standing. You may close your eyes or keep them open. Briefly scan your body for tension—particularly in the forehead, shoulders, or lower back—and release it as needed. Ensure your feet are comfortably grounded. Take several slow, deep breaths, allowing your exhalation to be slightly longer than your inhalation to promote relaxation.

Guided Visualization

Begin by imagining a basket—any size that feels right for you. Give it a color. Visualize a lid and assign it a color as well. Imagine the words “Worry Basket” written clearly on all sides.

Now, bring to mind the worries that have been occupying your thoughts. These may relate to health, finances, relationships, or broader concerns. Take your time to identify them without analysis or judgment.

One by one, imagine placing each worry into the basket. Trust that the basket can hold everything you place inside it. When you are finished, gently close the lid and set the basket aside—perhaps on a shelf. Step back and observe it. Remind yourself that you can return to these worries later if needed, but for now, they are safely contained.

Take several slow breaths as you notice the sense of space created by setting your worries aside.

Closing

When you are ready, gently open your eyes. Take a few deep breaths and acknowledge your effort. This practice is an effective way to manage worry and cultivate calm.

Practice Recommendations

Engage in this meditation daily, or more frequently during particularly challenging periods. It may be practiced alone or with others, indoors or outdoors, and with or without background music. Some people find it helpful to record the meditation or to use a physical basket and written notes as part of the exercise. This approach can also be adapted for children and adolescents experiencing anxiety.

Namaste

Breath Awareness Meditation

Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit. Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breathing. Inhale slowly through your nose, noticing the breath as it enters and leaves your body. Allow your breathing to become calm and steady.

Focus on the three phases of each breath: inhalation, a brief pause, and exhalation. When possible, allow the exhalation to be longer than the inhalation. Slower breathing is associated with reduced heart rate, lower blood pressure, and decreased stress hormone levels.

Practice diaphragmatic breathing by allowing the abdomen to expand during inhalation and gently draw inward during exhalation. You may place your hands on your abdomen to help notice this movement.

Count each breath to maintain focus. If your attention wanders, gently return to the breath and begin counting again. Practice for at least two minutes, gradually increasing to up to twenty minutes once or twice daily. Shorter sessions may also be practiced multiple times throughout the day. Choose a duration and frequency that feels sustainable. This practice is most effective when performed while alert. Mild, temporary dizziness may occur initially and typically resolves quickly. Soft music may be used if helpful.

Potential benefits of breath awareness meditation include improved attention and memory, greater emotional regulation, enhanced stress management, and improved problem-solving abilities.

Namaste

Letter from the heart of a person with dementia

My dearest _____
(name of the caregiver / care partner / care blazer)

As my mind weakens
slowly but relentlessly,
my soul strengthens
slowly but as relentlessly

As my memory of you
fades moment by moment,
my love and gratitude for you
grows every single moment

So, visit me with joy
and hold me tenderly,
for my heart is joyous in your joy
and savors these moments immensely



Blessings for Caregivers

May the love in your soul guide you.

May the courage within you overcome fears about caregiving.

May the heart within you conquer the pain involved in caregiving.

May you be given the best education and training, to overcome challenges in this journey.

May you have the commitment to care with compassion, to learn from failures, to be patient,

and be the best caregiver you can be.

May you have great respect for yourself.

May you show growing compassion and patience toward yourself as you come to realize how much

the well-being of (name of the person needing care) depends on you.

May you have the wisdom to hear

the unspoken gratitude (name of the person needing care) has for you.

And, above all, may you be given the wonderful gift of meeting the beauty that is within you.

May you be blessed, and may you find life enriched by your efforts of caregiving.

Adapted from John O'Donohue's poems

Caregivers are in reality care partners (receiving as much as giving)! We (healthcare professionals) need to make caring for the wellbeing of the caregiver / care-partner a top priority.

Podcast titled *Dementia Untangled* by Banner Health on Caregiving through late-stage dementia on 11/6/24 is recommended to understand the huge impact of all the amazing love and dedication caregivers on the lives of individuals with dementia