



# Dementia Friendly Grocery Stores

More businesses are beginning to respond to the impact of dementia on both customers and employees. Around 80% of people living with dementia live in the community (CDC, 2023). Many individuals with dementia continue to be actively involved in the community, including shopping at grocery stores. Shopping for groceries is a complex task that can become very difficult with dementia. It is important for grocery store employees to be aware of the signs of dementia and how to best serve these customers with patience and understanding.



Ready to implement dementia friendly practices? Follow the steps:

1

## Prepare

- Recognize signs of dementia.
- Discover dementia friendly business practices through staff training.

2

## Learn

- Learn to use dementia friendly practices.
- Know local services that help people living with dementia and their care partners.

3

## Respond

- Utilize the dementia friendly tips in future interactions.
- Establish policies that support customers living with dementia and employees who are care partners

## Definition & Signs of Dementia

Dementia is general term used to describe a wide range of symptoms such as changes in memory, thinking, problem solving skills, communication, and perception, enough to interfere with daily life. Dementia is caused by diseases of the brain. The most common cause or type of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, but there are many other diseases that can cause dementia. Symptoms include:

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life.
- Challenges in planning or solving problems.
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks.
- Confusion with time or place.
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.
- New problems with words in speaking or writing.
- Misplacing things. Losing the ability to retrace steps.
- Decreased or poor judgment.
- Withdrawal from work or social activities.
- Changes in mood or personality.

## Dementia & Grocery Shopping

- People with dementia may forget what an item is called or where it is located.
- Measuring bulk items or produce may become difficult.
- Too many options can be overwhelming. Deciding which items to buy or planning ahead for a meal can be frustrating.
- People with dementia may not be able to decipher their own grocery list.
- Glass automatic doors or other shiny surfaces can be startling or difficult to interpret.
- The environment of a grocery store (lots of people, shiny floors, bright lighting, and aisles full of options) can become overstimulating to a person with dementia.
- Payment with card or cash can be confusing for someone with dementia.
- The rushed feeling of a checkout can cause anxiety.
- People with dementia may become lost in the store or parking lot.
- Customers with dementia may unintentionally steal, not realizing they still need to pay.

## Dementia Friendly Business & Environment Practices

### Business Practice Tips:

- Treat all customers with respect and dignity, including those living with dementia and their care partners.
- Foster a connection with the customers' care partners if available, but continue to include the person with dementia with eye contact & conversation.
- Provide extra assistance to find the correct merchandise. Offer fewer options if the person seems overwhelmed with choices.
- Give clear, step-by-step instructions during the checkout & payment process.
- Provide plenty of staff who are available to assist customers. Offer to accompany customers to complete tasks when needed.
- If a person seems lost inside the store or in the parking lot, offer to assist. Offer to call a friend or family member on their phone. Last resort if all else fails, call the police, but avoid making a scene.
- Have lists of local resources available at customer service.

### Environment Tips:

- Indoor environments should be safe and accessible for people living with dementia: good natural lighting, uncluttered spaces, and prominent, easy-to-understand signs for restrooms, aisles, and checkouts.
- Limit how often items are moved around in the store.
- Provide family restrooms to allow for care partners to assist if necessary.
- Reduce background noise as much as possible. Turn phones and music down.
- Consider implementing a “relaxed lane” which is opposite of the fast lane, intended for people living with dementia, busy parents, or other customers who may not want to be rushed through the process, but instead may need more time or assistance.
- Wear clear, large nametags.
- Dementia is usually a hidden condition, so look for symptoms. In addition, be aware of “Please Be Patient” grocery cart signs or other indicators such as lanyards or bracelets that indicate a person may have dementia.

## More Dementia Friendly Communication Tips

- Slow pace slightly and allow time for person to process and respond.
- Use shorter simple sentences, and ask one question at a time.
- Speak clearly and calmly, be patient and understanding; listen.
- Use nonverbals if person can't find the right word (i.e.- point to an item on the shelf, motion to the register, etc.)
- Avoid arguing with or embarrassing the person.
- Connect instead of correct; step into the reality of the person living with dementia.
- Use approachable body language. Speak in a positive tone of voice. Smile and make eye contact to show you are a friend.
- Seek to understand the person's reality or feelings.
- Apologize and redirect to another environment or subject as needed.
- Provide cues instead of commands.