

A Holistic Approach to Memory Care at Venice Green Village



As we learn more about dementia, we're also understanding more about early identification and treatment of those with the disease. We're still waiting for a cure, but in the meantime, research has shown that early treatment of Alzheimer's disease and other memory illnesses can have a great effect on maintaining abilities and slowing the progression of the disease. Early treatment can range from medications, preventative measures and even holistic approaches like aromatherapy, sensory stimulation, music therapy and more.

"Holistic treatments play an integral role in the treatment of our memory care patients, with remarkable results," says Karen Hallenbeck, Executive Director of Venice Green Village, a memory care assisted living community in Venice, Florida. Working with the residents and their family members, we learn their histories, preferences, emotions and current strengths and abilities. By looking at the whole person instead of just dementia systems or brain function, we're able to put together a personalized care plan that resonates with each individual resident."

While dementia patients lose their ability to communicate effectively and express themselves, they're still able to maintain a sense of identity, individuality and self-awareness, says Hallenbeck. "By recognizing that individual spark, we're able to provide residents with opportunities to experience joy every day."

The Mind-Body Connection

Scientists are learning more about how mental health and wellness affect our whole-body health. For example, extreme stress doesn't just affect our psychological health. It can cause our immune systems to crash, making us sick more easily and can also cause high blood pressure and other cardiovascular issues.

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* states that participating in enjoyable activities keeps brain cells functioning and even keeps cognitive skills intact longer. These are two of the biggest factors that can reduce a person's risk of dementia or slow the progression of the disease if an individual already has it. What defines an "enjoyable activity?" Anything that engages the individual and is something they have fun doing. Some examples are playing or listening to music, doing puzzles or games with others or even volunteering one's time. Many dementia patients have or had hobbies they enjoy doing, so it's important to adapt activities that allow them to pursue those interests. For example, if a resident was an accomplished knitter, finding simple patterns or solutions is a great way for her to perform a favorite task without becoming frustrated.

When determining a good holistic care program for an individual patient, four factors must be considered:

- What is the best and most comforting environment for the individual, and what would trigger anxiety?
- What form of communication works best for the individual?
- What does a nutrient-rich and balanced diet look like for this person?
- What activities will allow the individual to be creative through their existing abilities?

1. Environment

Environment plays a very important role in the comfort of individuals with dementia. The disease causes fearfulness, confusion and difficulty with interpreting what's around them. By understanding the different triggers for a senior with dementia, and knowing how to eliminate those triggers, caregivers can holistically minimize adverse reactions like anxiety and agitation. Venice Green Village in Venice, Florida is purposefully designed to meet the unique needs of individuals with Alzheimer's disease, dementia and other memory loss. By providing appropriate lighting, directional cues and an attention to ambient sounds, we're able to maximize safety while ensuring our residents live in a happy, homelike environment.

2. Communication

Effectively communicating to someone with dementia can be difficult. As the disease progresses, they lose the ability to think logically and express their feelings. As a caregiver, it's important to "speak dementia" by understanding why your loved one is acting the way they are, what their actions are trying to say and how you can effectively nurture, validate and help them. The team at Venice Green Village understand that both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication should be used to effectively communicate with those in our care. Our staff and professional caregivers receive extensive training in order to understand the most successful ways to use words and body language to care for our residents.

3. Diet

What we eat affects our health in so many ways, and that's especially true for seniors with dementia. Proper nutrition is especially important for this demographic due to the increase in health issues that arise from the disease, as well as the aging process itself. Seniors require more nutritional support than younger people, so it's important to have a balanced diet filled with lean meats, fiber, plenty of fruits and vegetables and proper hydration. Depending on an individual's health issues, they may also need a restricted or adapted diet, such as a low-sodium diet or one with fewer carbs in general. This allows for maintaining organ health, body function, muscle strength and mental health. Chef Jamie at Venice Green Village carefully balances our residents' health needs along with their food preferences in order to serve a healthy, nutritionally balanced diet.

4. Activities

Boredom and under-stimulation cause a whole host of disturbing behaviors in dementia residents, including depression, agitation, anger and even a health decline. By pairing simple exercises, engaging activities and fulfilling opportunities, Venice Green Village is able to honor our residents' abilities while providing quite a bit of fun along the way. Certain activities, like music therapy, can actually help improve memory and communication opportunities because artistic endeavors often use different areas of the brain that are not as affected by dementia.

The Benefits of Holistic Treatments

By integrating holistic memory care treatments into our residents' daily life, we're able to see a variety of benefits. Here are just a few:

- **Decreased use of medication.** Reducing the amount of medicine a senior takes can reduce unwanted side effects and drug interactions.

- **Whole-body health.** Treating every part of the body instead of focusing on just one (the brain or physical), produces results that are greater than the sum of their individual parts.
- **Improved flexible care approaches with higher success.** Holistic therapies allow us to adapt and shift care plans to meet each individual's need instead of trying to cram residents into a cookie-cutter care approach.

If you would like more information about how a holistic approach to memory care can help your loved one live a fulfilled life, contact Venice Green Village, Karen Hallenbeck, Executive Director at **941-488-5970**.