

Dementia Awareness Week

What is dementia?

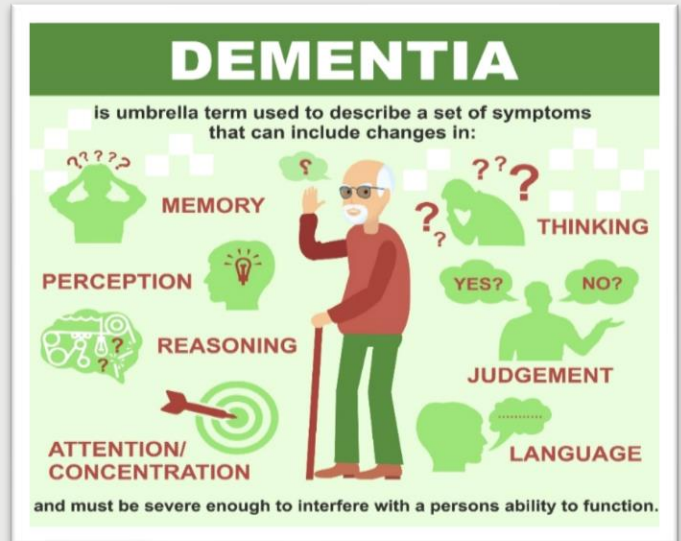
By Rose Livingston, OSCAR Care Group

Dementia describes a collection of symptoms that are caused by disorders affecting the brain. It is not one specific disease.

Dementia affects thinking, behaviour and the ability to perform everyday tasks. Brain function is affected enough to interfere with the person's normal social or working life. The hallmark of dementia is the inability to carry out everyday activities as a consequence of diminished cognitive ability.

Doctors diagnose dementia if two or more cognitive functions are significantly impaired. The cognitive functions affected can include memory, language skills, understanding information, spatial skills, judgement and attention.

People with dementia may have difficulty solving problems and controlling their emotions. They may also experience personality changes.



The exact symptoms experienced by a person with dementia depend on the areas of the brain that are damaged by the disease causing the dementia.

With many types of dementia, some of the nerve cells in the brain stop functioning, lose connections with other cells, and die. Dementia is usually progressive. This means that the disease gradually spreads through the brain and the person's symptoms get worse over time.





Who gets dementia?

Dementia can happen to anybody, but the risk increases with age. Most people with dementia are older, but it is important to remember that most older people do not get dementia. It is not a normal part of ageing but is caused by brain disease. Less commonly, people under the age of 65 years develop dementia and this is called 'younger onset dementia'.

There are a few very rare forms of inherited dementia, where a specific gene mutation is known to cause the disease. In most cases of dementia however, these genes are not involved, but people with a family history of dementia do have an increased risk.

Certain health and lifestyle factors also appear to play a role in a person's risk of dementia. People with untreated vascular risk factors including high blood pressure have an increased risk, as do those who are less physically and mentally active. Detailed information about dementia risk factors is available at www.yourbrainmatters.org.au



What are the early signs of dementia?

The early signs of dementia can be very subtle, vague and may not be immediately obvious. Some common symptoms may include:

- Progressive and frequent memory loss
- Confusion
- Personality change
- Apathy and withdrawal
- Loss of ability to perform everyday tasks



What can be done to help?

At present there is no cure for most forms of dementia. However, some medications have been found to reduce some symptoms. Support is vital for people with dementia and the help of families, friends and carers can make a positive difference to managing the condition.

Communicating with someone with Dementia

When someone has Alzheimer's or dementia, changes in their brain cause a decline in their ability to listen and respond to normal conversation.

It has been found that speaking in short, direct sentences is a way to communicate that's more comfortable for them. With less information to process, they're more likely to understand what you're saying and respond appropriately.

Daily Caring.com explains below why this technique works and shares 4 real-life examples of how to communicate kindly while using fewer words.



DailyCaring

Why short sentences work better in dementia

Alzheimer's and dementia affect the brain's ability to process and retrieve information. That can make it very difficult for someone with dementia to listen, understand, and respond appropriately to normal conversation. That's why using short, direct sentences with only one thought per sentence is recommended.



It makes it easier for someone with dementia to understand what you're saying. Thoughts that are long or complex can be overwhelming because it's too much to process. This technique might feel strange at first because we're used to using friendly conversation to fill the silence, let someone know what's happening, or to show that we care.

But combining fewer words with a warm and positive tone will be less frustrating for seniors with dementia and is just as kind.



How to talk to someone with Dementia: 4 real-life examples

Each person is different and has a different level of cognitive impairment. Use these 4 examples as a starting point and experiment to find what works best for both the person with dementia and you.

Example 1: It's time for the person with dementia to use the bathroom

DO say: It's time to go to the bathroom now.

DON'T say: It's been about an hour since you last visited the bathroom so why don't we go to the bathroom and you can give it a try. Ok? How does that sound? Do you want to go to the bathroom now?

Example 2: It's time for the person with dementia to have lunch

DO say: Mmmmm, it's time to eat spaghetti! ... (pause) ... Let's go to the kitchen.

DON'T say: Are you hungry? It's lunch time and I thought you'd enjoy one of your favorites – spaghetti. Let's go to the kitchen so you can eat. After lunch, we'll go outside for a walk so you can get some fresh air. How does that sound?

Example 3: You're taking the person with dementia to a doctor appointment

DO say: It's time to go out...(pause)...Here's your jacket...(pause)...Let's get into the car.

DON'T say: We're going to see Dr. Lee today. She's going to check to see how you're doing with those new medications. Remember how we had to reschedule the appointment from last month? I'm glad she had an opening this soon. You know what? It's a little chilly today, why don't you put on your jacket while I get the keys and then we'll go out to the car together.

Example 4: A family member has come to visit

DO say: It's Sally, your granddaughter ... (pause) ... She's come to say hello!

DON'T say: Oh look, you have a visitor! Do you know who that is? Sally was just here last week. Don't you remember?



6 nonverbal dementia communication techniques from Daily Caring

1. Be patient and calm

Project a positive and calm attitude – it can help your older adult communicate more easily.

Try not to interrupt them & give them your full attention.

Avoid body language that shows frustration, anger, or impatience. When a situation is very frustrating, staying calm can be tough. In those cases, it's worthwhile to step away for a minute to do some deep breathing or calming exercises so you can come back with a calm attitude.

That helps you avoid a situation where your tension or frustration could subconsciously influence your older adult's responses or behavior.

2. Keep voice, face, and body relaxed and positive

Have a pleasant or happy look on your face – a tense facial expression could cause distress and make communication more difficult.

Keep your tone of voice positive and friendly.

3. Be consistent

Avoid confusion by making sure your body language and facial expressions match the words you're speaking.

4. Make eye contact and respect personal space

Approach from the front so they can see you coming and have a chance to process who you are and the fact that you're going to interact with them.

Don't stand too close or stand over them – it can feel intimidating.

Keep your face at or below their eye level, this helps them feel more in control of the situation.

Make and maintain eye contact while having a conversation.

5. Use gentle touch to reassure

Physical touch can give comfort and reassurance but be sure to observe to make sure they're comfortable with the touching. This could include:

- Shaking hands
- Patting or holding their hand
- Patting or rubbing their shoulder or back
- Putting an arm around them
- Giving a hug

6. Observe their nonverbal reactions

Dementia may make it difficult for your older adult to express themselves verbally.

Watch for signs of frustration, anger, or fear and adjust your responses and actions to calm or soothe as needed.

Dementia doesn't
discriminate.

Do you?

Dementia Action Week

16–22 September 2019

an initiative of  dementia
australia™

Dementia Action Week 16–22 September 2019

An initiative of Dementia Australia.

Dementia Action Week 2019 will explore discrimination and dementia.

Dementia Australia is calling on all Australians to consider how discrimination impacts people living with dementia, their families and carers. Nobody chooses to have dementia, but we can choose how we respond to the people in our lives who are living with dementia.

Become a Dementia Friend, and get access to a **free 15 minute video** to better understand dementia, its impacts, and what makes a dementia-friendly community.

Sign up here: www.dementiafriendly.org.au

For more information, please contact:

Dementia Australia:

<https://www.dementia.org.au/about-us>

