

Medical Program

Communication Strategies for Caregivers of a Person with Dementia



What is dementia?

Dementia is a condition of the brain that makes it harder to remember and think. With dementia, a person's intellect, memory, personality and ability to communicate worsens over time. The most common type is Alzheimer's disease.

Getting the Message IN

You can change the way you communicate to make sure the person with dementia understands you.

- Use **gentle touch** to gain attention.
- Speak face-to-face.
- Speak **slowly**. **Pause** often.
- Use **intonation** in your voice. Intonation is the way your voice rises and falls as you speak.
- Repeat what you are saying.
- Rephrase/restate the information.

Say: "I'm going on vacation. I'm taking a trip."

• **Be specific**. Use proper names instead of he, she, they.

Say: "Mike" Say: "Toothbrush" Instead of: "He" Instead of: "it"

- Break down instructions into smaller steps.
- Support your speech with exaggerated facial expressions and body language.
- Reduce distractions in the room. For example, turn the television off.

Getting the Message OUT



You can help a person with dementia express their thoughts to you.

- Ask the person with dementia yes or no questions.
- Ask closed-ended questions. The person answering this type of question can respond with one word or with a short, specific piece of information.

Ask: "Shall we go to the grocery store or to the mall?" Instead of: "Where shall we go?"

- Provide choices when asking questions.
 Ask: "Do you mean Bob or David?"
 Instead of: "Who are you talking about?"
- Encourage the person with dementia to use props, objects, or pictures.
- **Do not criticize or correct** incorrect statements. This can agitate the person with dementia.
- If the person with dementia is getting frustrated, gently change the subject.



Reference: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2016). Delirium, Dementia, and Depression in Older Adults: Assessment and Care (2nd ed.) Toronto, ON: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

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English: This information is important! If you have trouble reading this, ask someone to help you.

Italian: Queste informazoni sono importanti! Se ha difficoltà a leggere questo, chieda aiuto a qualcuno.

Spanish: ¡Esta información es importante! Si tiene dificultad en leer esto, pida que alguien le ayude.

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