

Language Changes & Dementia

Individuals with dementia will experience many changes as their disease progresses. One of the most noticeable changes is in language. You may notice that their vocabulary diminishes, use of inappropriate language may increase, and an increase in use of body language to communicate.

Language Loss

Language loss often begins with a difficulty finding words. At this early stage, the individual will still be able to give enough clues that the caregiver is able to guess the missing word.

As the disease progresses, language will become more vague. You will see an increased use of general pronouns (such as it, her, that one) and a difficulty using correct relationship terms (such as brother for husband, mother for sister). Communication becomes more challenging as it becomes more difficult for the caregiver to guess.

Over time, language will become very limited – the individual may know only a few phrases, and though they still try to communicate, they simply lack the words. At this stage communication comes more from body language than from the words themselves.

Preserved Language

The formal language center is located on the left side of the brain, and this is one of the first areas that is damaged in dementia patients. The right side of the brain, however, is preserved, and it performs a number of functions.

One is singing and music – this is why an individual who has a great deal of trouble speaking may be able to easily recite all of the verses to a hymn or song.



Another preserved function is automatic social responses, such as “How are you?” “Fine”, “No, thank you”, and “Okay”. It is key to remember that the individual with dementia may not actually understand what you say, and respond instead to your body language. They may feel upset when at last they figure out what you mean and think that they have been tricked.



Inappropriate Language

There are two factors in play that contribute to the use of inappropriate language in an individual with dementia. The first is a lack of impulse control that is associated with brain damage caused by dementia; the individual will say or do whatever they are thinking. The second is that “forbidden” words are stored on the right side of the brain — the side that is preserved for longer.

@#\$%!

It is important to remember that cursing and foul language are caused by dementia; the individual may not be intending to speak in an offensive manner.

References:

- <http://www.alznc.org/>
- <http://www.alz.org>
- http://www.dementiacarecentral.com/video/effect_speech

How can you help?

Visit!

The presence of much loved family and friends provides comfort.

Reminisce!

Tell the stories of the special moments in your loved ones life.

Family photos!

Looking at old family photos is a great way to provide a meaningful focus for your visit.

Read a story!

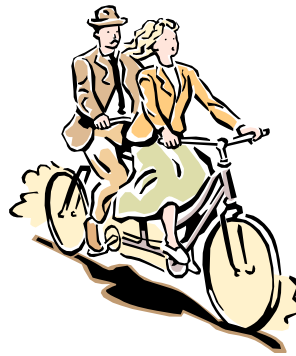
Just hearing your well-known voice may provide comfort for your relative

Sensory objects

Bring items that provide a focus for your visit such as a flower, a pet, a letter, photograph or tactile objects.

Sing!

Recent research is showing that singing the songs that a person was sung when they were very young helps to stimulate activity in the brain.



Bicycle built for two!

Walk!

Movement helps to stimulate brain activity.

Tips!

Introduce yourself!

Hi Mom, it's me Sarah.

Simple Sentences

Keep communication simple. Stay with one topic at a time.

Quiet Environment

Stimulation from a variety of sources makes it difficult to focus... find a comfortable place to visit away from movement and noise.



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