

## For Caregivers: Improving Communication with Dementia Patients



Dementia makes it harder for your loved one to understand and be understood. This can be troubling for both of you. Remember, these problems are not your loved one's fault. They're due to the disease. These tips can help you find ways to cope.



### Keep it simple

The best way to talk to your loved one is using simple words and short sentences. Be sure you have their attention. Stick to one subject at a time. And use a gentle, positive tone of voice. Timing is also important. Giving information for activities that are hours away may be a waste of time and energy.

Instead of saying: "It's cold outside, so be sure to put on your coat and hat."

Try: "Please put on your coat. Now put on your hat."

### Be patient

People with dementia often lose their short-term memory. This means they may ask the same question over and over. Although it can be frustrating, do your best to remain calm. Try changing the subject or getting your loved one to focus on a new task. Or, try to understand why the question is being asked. For example, your loved one may worry about missing an appointment or being left behind.

Instead of saying: "I've already told you—the appointment is at 2 o'clock!"

Try: "Don't worry. I'm going with you."

### Use distraction

Your loved one may try to do things that are inappropriate or unsafe. At these times, a good tactic is using distraction. Try getting your loved one to focus on something new. Your loved one may then forget what they were doing in the first place.

Instead of saying: "What are you doing? You can't go out now!"

Try: "Would you help me with dinner?"

## Try statements, not questions

Your loved one may not want to do certain activities. Instead of arguing, phrase requests as statements rather than questions. Using visual cues, such as holding a towel when it's time for a bath, can also help.

Instead of saying: "Do you want to take your bath now?"

Try: "It's time for your bath. Let me help you get ready."

## Don't argue about reality

People with dementia may not be able to separate past from present. If this happens, don't insist on your version of reality. It may be best to change the subject or "play along" to avoid added stress. Refrain from using harsh words or angry gestures. Your loved one may not understand you. But they can still be upset by your emotional cues. And if your loved one becomes very upset, stay calm. Try to redirect their attention to another activity.

Instead of saying: "You can't call your father. He's been dead for years!"

Try: "Let's look at some pictures of him."

## Coping with changes in behavior and personality

People with dementia may have moments when they seem perfectly normal. At other times, they may act suspicious, angry, or afraid. They can also become agitated, or see things that aren't there. If this happens, try to be understanding. For them, the world can be a very stressful place. However, if these changes are sudden, severe, or create safety issues, talk to a doctor. You should also mention any signs of depression. These include withdrawal, loss of interest in activities or food, extreme tiredness, and crying.

© 2000-2027 The StayWell Company, LLC. All rights reserved. This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions.  
This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your Healthcare professional's instructions. Copyright Krames LLC.