

Communication Tips:

Communicating with people who have dementia

1. Speak at your usual pace

You don't need to speak slowly to someone with dementia: for many with dementia they have a poor working memory and can only hold information for a short time. If you speak too slowly the person may forget what you've said before you finish.

2. Start with your main point

Remember that those with dementia have difficulty with working memory so always say what you want first: for example, instead of saying "*eat your dinner here*", say "*sit here to eat your dinner*".

3. Reduce background noise

Hearing loss in older people is common, and background noise is particularly destructive to people with dementia. If the person you're talking to is having difficulty hearing, find another place for the conversation.

4. Make sure your body language matches what you are saying

Like many of us, if your non-verbal communication is different from what you are saying, this can result in considerable confusion for those with dementia. To have a meaningful conversation, give your listener your undivided attention, don't talk while completing another task such as watching television or doing work.

5. Mirror the listener

This means try to adopt the same position as the person with dementia: if the listener is sitting, then you sit. If the listener is standing, then you stand. Make sure you are face to face with the listener.

6. Be straightforward and brief

Use short, concrete and direct statements with older people with dementia. Most people can interpret abstract questions or statements or those containing metaphors. Those with dementia will have much difficulty doing so. For example, say *“take your medication at night”* rather than *“to prevent you from waking up during the night take your medication before you go to bed”*.

7. Stop and check regularly

Every now and then stop talking and check with the listener that he or she understands. Comprehension of language and responding appropriately are complex processes which may not be available to those with dementia.

8. Repetition, repetition, repetition

This simply means that you may be required to repeat your statements, or answers to one with dementia. It is likely that you will hear the same questions often repeated by the person with dementia which can be quite frustrating. However, rather than feel annoyed, remember that the questions are the person’s attempt to communicate. When you respond to repeated questions, try to use variations in your answers.

.....
Carl Holroyd
Assessor / Counsellor

Adapted from: Brain Health as you age: Simmons, Mansbach, Lyons & thebacat.com