

Understanding Communication in Dementia

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Dementia

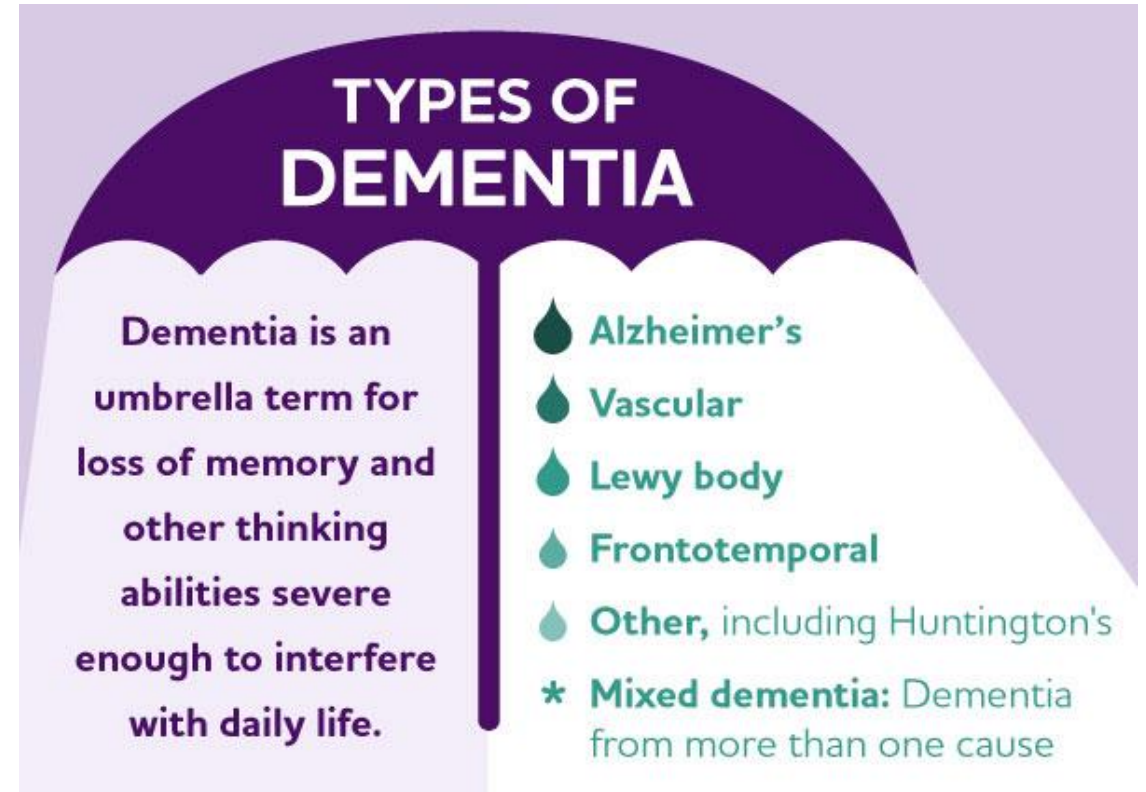
What is dementia?

- It is progressive brain degeneration
- Dementia is caused by over 100 different diseases and disorders

It is **not** a normal part of ageing

- 1 in 2,800 children can develop dementia
- 27,800 Australians under 65 years have younger onset dementia
- 1 in 10 adults aged 65+ years develop dementia
- 3 in 10 adults aged 85+ years develop dementia

Source: Dementia Australia, The-Dementia-Guide-2022; Alzheimer's Association



10 Early Signs & Symptoms

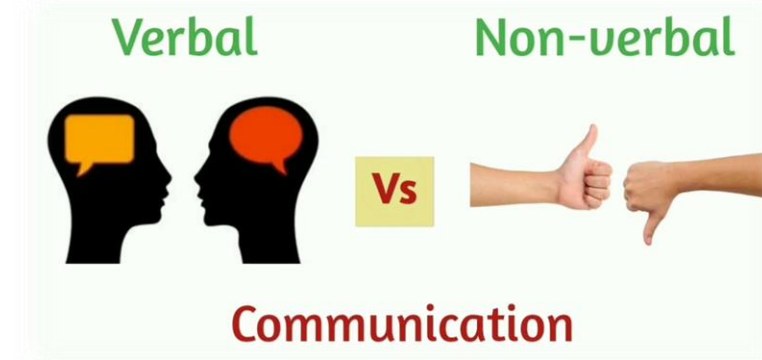
Dementia Symptoms	Typical age-related change
1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life ➤ Forgetting recently learned information (esp. in early stage)	<i>Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later</i>
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems	<i>Making occasional errors when managing finances or household bills</i>
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks	<i>Occasionally needing help to some unfamiliar tasks, e.g. use microwave settings or to record a TV show</i>
4. Confusion with time or place	<i>Getting confused about the day of the week but figuring it out later</i>
5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships	<i>Vision changes related to cataracts</i>

10 Early Signs & Symptoms

Dementia Symptoms	Typical age-related change
6. New problems with words in speaking or writing ➤ struggle with vocabulary, trouble in naming a familiar object or use the wrong name	<i>Sometimes having trouble finding the right word</i>
7. Misplacing things & losing the ability to retrace steps	<i>Misplacing things from time to time and retracing steps to find them</i>
8. Decreased or poor judgment	<i>Making a bad decision or mistake once in a while</i>
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities	<i>Sometimes feeling uninterested in family or social obligations</i>
10. Changes in mood and personality	<i>Developing very specific ways of doing things and becoming irritable when a routine is disrupted</i>

Communication

- ❖ **The person with dementia is likely to communicate at a feeling level**
- ❖ **Communication relating to feelings & attitudes is made up of three parts:**
 - **Body language 55%**
 - **Tone & pitch 38%**
 - **Words 7%**



*Statistics source: Mehrabian, Albert (1981) Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes. 2nd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth

Communication

Techniques to improve communication

- Reduce background noise (turn off the TV or radio)
- Ensure there is good lighting and you can see each other's face while talking, eye contact
- Use short and simple sentences. Focus on one piece of information at a time
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Ask questions that require a 'Yes' or 'No' answer, give two options, e.g. "Would you like juice or water?"

Communication

Techniques to improve communication (cont'd)

- Give the person **extra** time for the words to sink in and for the person to respond
- If the person does not respond, they may not have heard or understood. Repeat or reword your question but keep it simple
- Smile, be friendly and approachable. Try to stay calm and not get frustrated

****It is important to check hearing aids are functioning correctly or glasses are cleaned regularly if the person has hearing impairment or requires visual aids.**

Communication

Alternative ways to communicate

- **Touch** – most underestimated communication tool, e.g. holding hands, gentle stroking and a simple hug will often say more than a thousand words
- **Go for a walk together** – just being together and sharing a moment of communication
- **Reminisce** – looking at family photos or listening to music can bring back ‘feel good’ emotions



Communication

Alternative ways to communicate (cont'd)

- **Eat meal together – most communication and socialization occurs during mealtimes and it provides an opportunity to relax and enjoy a familiar activity**



****It is absolutely vital to continue to communicate in whatever way possible, even if the person with dementia is no longer talking. Being flexible in your approach is most crucial. ****

Source: Dementia Australia



Person-centred approaches

- **Reality Orientation**
- **Reminiscence**
- **Validation**

Source: Dementia Support Australia

Communication: Person-centred Approaches

Reality Orientation

Using things around the people living with dementia as a reminder, reminding them repeatedly, so that they can re-master the concept of time, place, and person.

It can alleviate disorientation and forgetfulness, enhance coping with life and help reduce behavioural problems.

Reminiscence

Using things in front of a person to trigger the memories. Reminiscing is not only recalling past experiences, emotions, self, and other things that do not usually appear in the consciousness of daily life, but also re-feeling and reorganizing these things in the past.

- Bring up +ve emotions
- Uplift self-esteem
- Improve social skills
- Promote communication skill

Validation

Communication approach that recognizes and accepts the feelings of the people living with dementia.

Goal: let the person feel accepted, there is someone understands their emotional state & encourages them to express their feelings → they feel that no matter where they are, there is always someone walking with them.

↑ the person's sense of trust and security

↓ their anxiety

**Any example of applying
these person-centred
approaches?**

**Reality
Orientation**

Reminiscence

Validation

Useful websites:

- **Dementia Australia:** www.dementia.org.au
- **Dementia Support Australia:** www.dementia.com.au
 - ✓ Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Services (DBMAS)
 - Provide support for people experiencing dementia-related behaviour changes and their carers
- **Moving Pictures - Dementia Awareness for CALD communities:**
www.movingpictures.org.au
 - ✓ Dementia Awareness Films in 9 languages: Arabic, Cantonese, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Mandarin, Spanish, Tamil, Vietnamese

When I Wander Author Unknown

When I wander, don't tell me to come and sit down. Wander with me. It may be because I'm hungry, thirsty, need the toilet. Or may be I just need to stretch my legs.

When I call for my mother (even though I'm ninety!) don't tell me she has died. Reassure me, cuddle me, ask me about her. I may be that I'm looking for the security that my mother once gave me.

When I shout out please don't ask me to be quiet...or walk by. I am trying to tell you something, but have difficulty in telling you what. Be patient. Try to find out. I may be in pain.

When I become agitated or appear angry, please don't reach for the drugs first. I am trying to tell you something. It may be too hot, too bright, too noisy. Or may be it's because I miss my loved ones. Try to find out first.

When I don't eat my dinner or drink my tea, it may be because I've forgotten how to. Show me what to do, remind me. It may be that I just need to hold my knife and fork, I may know what to do then.

When I push you away when you're trying to help me wash or get dressed, maybe it's because I've forgotten what you have said. Keep telling me what you're doing over and over and over. Maybe others will think you're the one that needs the help!

With all my thoughts and maybes, perhaps it will be you who reaches my thoughts, understands my fears, and will make me feel safe. Maybe it will be you who I need to thank.

If I only know how.





Thank You!