

Communication and Dementia

Listening with your Heart

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Learning Objectives

- To understand the communication process
- To recognize the barriers to communication in normal aging and in adults with dementia
- To understand the importance of non-verbal communication



Learning Objectives

- To identify strategies for effective communication with people with dementia
- To review current programs that address communication and dementia
- To highlight the role of the SLP with dementia



SLP role

- Assess and manage swallowing disorders
- Assess and manage communication disorders
- Staff training
- Family counselling
- Advance care plan discussions



Communication

- Exchange of information, ideas, and knowledge between people
- A reciprocal process
- Dependent on the ability of those involved to share not only words, but concepts, emotions, and thoughts
- Verbal and Non-verbal



Communication is ...

- “Interpreting the messages and responding in an appropriate manner”

– Caris-Verhallen

- “How we share our ideas, needs and feelings with one another”

– D. Ripich

- “When an idea is passed correctly from one person to another”

– J. Powell



Purpose of Communication

- Expression of wants and needs
- Exchange of information
- Maintenance of social etiquette
- Social closeness



4 areas of Language

- Understanding
- Talking (verbal expression)
- Reading
- Writing



Aging Changes

that Affect Communication



Vision

Hearing

Touch & Pain

Smell

Taste





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THAT
OLD**

KeepCalmAndPosters.com



Dementia

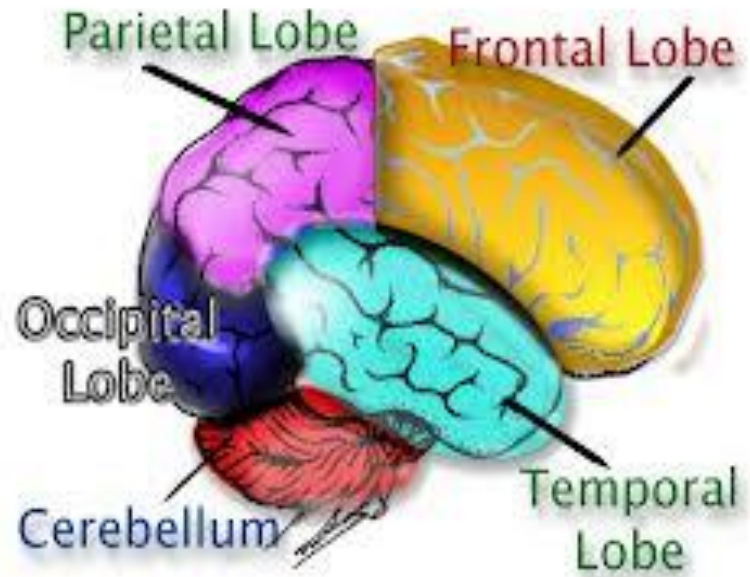
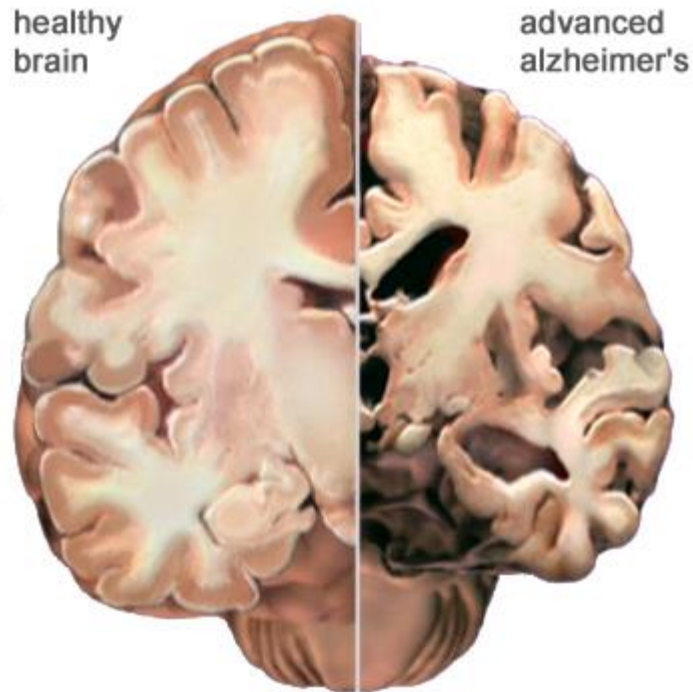
Dementia is an overall term for a set of symptoms that are caused by disorders affecting the brain. Symptoms may include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language, severe enough to reduce a person's ability to perform everyday activities. A person with dementia may also experience changes in mood or behaviour.

Dementia is progressive, which means the symptoms will gradually get worse as more brain cells become damaged.....

www.alzheimer.ca



Dementia and the Brain



Communication Losses

with Dementia

Early Stages

- Takes longer to process information
- Thoughts may wander from the conversation – difficulty staying on track
- Problems recalling names of people, places and things
- ‘Tip of the tongue’ feeling
- May repeat words and phrases



Communication Losses

with Dementia

Mid Stage

- Forget more complex words; may invent words to ‘fill the gap’
- Increased generalizations
- Loss of sense of message – greater reliance on social phrases
- Difficulties in following verbal and written instructions
- Less initiation of conversation



Communication Losses

with Dementia

Late Stage

- Use of single words
- Limited initiation of conversations
- Non-verbal sounds
- Communication as a whole is largely non-verbal



Sensory Changes



Communication is ...

7% Verbal

93% Nonverbal

(tone of voice, posture, facial expression)



“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.” Peter F. Drucker



Non-Verbal Communication

All aspects of communication other than words.

- includes, but is not limited to:

- Facial expression
- Body motion/position
- Touch
- Environmental factors
- Personal space
- Chronemics
- Paralanguage
- Silence



Non-Verbal Strategies

- smile
- posture
- gestures
- tone of voice
- rate of speech
- pauses
- equality



Strategies

for Effective Communication



*The journey into dementia has its
disappointments to be endured
as well as its triumphs to be cherished.
In all of the ambiguities and confusion
there may also be signs of hope,
for this is a journey with intersecting
signposts; reminders of the past and
pointers to the future. There are always
fresh opportunities
for a new walk on a new day.*

– Rosalie Hudson, 2006



Road Maps

Recognize challenges with initiating and maintaining conversation

- Set the stage
- Make sure they can see you
- Use their preferred name
- Supports
- Approach



Approach

- Teepa Snow: How to Approach ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com))
- 1) front-side
- 2) equality
- 3) greet before you treat
- 4) permission
- 5) lock and rock



Reading the Road Signs

- The loss of verbal language skills leads to greater reliance on non-verbal language signs
- Strategies
 - Friendly, calm tone
 - Accommodate hearing loss
 - Watch facial expression, body position



Two-way Streets

- 50/50 may become 90/10
- Caregiver frequently directs the conversation
- Use strategies to open lanes of communication
 - Simple words/phrases
 - Slower pace
 - Longer pauses
 - Meaningful use of touch
 - Use of supportive materials (pictures, photos)



Developing Two-way Streets

- Studies have shown that direct communication with care providers comprises only 2% of a resident's day
- Study of nursing interactions in long-term care
 - Staff always started the conversation
 - Residents were often sleeping when staff entered the room
 - The topic of conversation by nurses was always health or sickness – other staff sometimes talked about: weather, sleep, plans for the day



Dead Ends

Strategies for overcoming communication dead ends:

- Active listening
- Asking for clarification
- Repeating part of what you heard
- Re-approach later
- Change the topic or the form of the message
- Break up the message or simplify content
- Use supports (visuals)
- Change from open-ended question to multiple choice or yes/no question
- **Acknowledge them**



Stuck on the Bypass

- Messages in an endless loop
- **Strategies**
 - Don't argue
 - Unmet needs?
 - Respond to the tone/feelings
 - Distract



Turn Signals

- Use of Yes/No answers
- **Strategies**
 - Rephrase/repeat
 - Open-ended ?
 - Watch for nonverbals



Familiar Routes

Knowing the person

- Joining their world
- Empathic listening
- Learning personal background



Rest Stops

- Losing train of thought

Strategies

- Minimize distractions
- Review the conversation
- Reassuring statements
- Allow time for silence
- Reassuring presence



Tune-ups

Ongoing monitoring of communication and care plan updates

- Check your toolbox
- Check the language level
- Check the volume
- Check the timing
- Adjust the attitude
- Check the environment



Suggestions for Comfortable Conversations

- 1) avoid talking across people
- 2) be aware- you may have heard this before
- 3) express one idea at a time
- 4) give time
- 5) look for meaning behind words
- 6) keep it simple



Making the most of your visit

- timing
- call ahead
- greeting
- let them lead
- minimize distractions
- pets
- go outside
- project



Enhance the Environment



Optimize the Visual Aspects

- Enhance lighting
- Maximize contrast
- Minimize glare
- Maximize cueing



Enhance Lighting

- General ambient lighting- 30 fc
- Bathroom- 50-60 fc
- Reading area- 75 fc
- Dining, kitchen, work area- 50 fc
- **Agitation increases with poor lighting**
- **Improves communication and eating**



Maximize Contrast



Reduce Glare



Cueing



Optimizing Hearing

- Minimize background noise
- Minimize reverberation
- Ensure hearing aids are working
- Keep music low and pleasant
- Keep conversations focused



Programs and Techniques



PIECES

- **Physical**
- **Intellectual**
- **Emotional**
- **Capabilities**
- **Environment**
- **Social**



Validation

- Center
- Observe
- Appropriate distance
- Verbal/ Nonverbal
- Empathy
- Positive note



Video

- “Gladys Wilson” ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com))



Montessori



Memory Books/Wallet



Lifestory Profile



Music & Memory

Music unravels a memory, mends a thought,
masks a pain, recaptures a moment and leaves a
trail of healing in its gentle wake

Dr. Kaylan Subrahmanyam



- “Henry” (Alive Inside) ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8C3D8116Uv4))



“There may be no single thing more important in our efforts to achieve meaningful work and fulfilling relationships than to learn to practice the art of communication”.

– Max DePree



Questions?



References

Hearing the Person with Dementia- Bernie McCarthy (2011).

Memory & Communication Aids- for People with Dementia- Michelle Bourgeois

You Say Goodbye- We Say Hello- Tom & Karen Brenner
ECAT

Validation Techniques Vicki de Klerk-Rubin

Listen talk connect - Communicating with people living with dementia

