



At Arbor Springs, we are dedicated to helping families manage the realities of dementia with as much love, dignity and knowledge as possible. This monthly enewsletter is our way of offering helpful tips and insights that will hopefully make your days with your loved one a little easier, happier, and calm.

One of the major difficulties persons with dementia face is communication. Alzheimer's disease gradually diminishes a person's ability to not only process what is being said to them, but also the ability for them to communicate their needs and wants. Consequently, this can be a significant source of frustration and anger for them.

Effective communication begins with understanding the individual with whom you are trying to communicate. A person with dementia is an individual; he or she should not be defined by their dementia. Become familiar with the person's life story, preferences, routines, and values. This will not only give you topics for conversation with the person, but more importantly, help you to provide better care.

### **The Do's List For Effective Communication:**

- 1) Be sure to set the stage for communication. Approach the person with slow movements. People with dementia tend to perceive movement as much faster than it actually is, and that is frightening for them. Walk slowly across the room. Make eye contact with the person, call them by their preferred name and introduce yourself. Show the person that they have your undivided attention by putting your body at the same level or slightly below the person. If the person is in a wheelchair, sit down or crouch beside them. Eliminate background noise, as it can be distracting for the person with dementia. Make sure they are using any necessary assistive devices, such as glasses or hearing aids.
- 2) Slow down. A loss of brain function causes the person with dementia to be unable to process information as quickly as before. Slowing down is probably the most important thing you can do in communicating with them. Be patient during communication and give them plenty of time to process and respond to information.
- 3) Simplify your verbal communication. Try using short sentences that provide simple instructions. When you give a direction, give only one step at a time. For example, "I'm going to help you put on your blouse. Let's start with this sleeve." Also use concrete terms. Telling the person with dementia to "put that over there" is likely to be meaningless. "Please put the vase on the table" is better. When asking an individual to make a decision, it may be helpful to limit options to no more than two, such as "Do you want chicken or meatloaf for supper?" You may

even need to ask yes or no questions.

4) State things in a positive manner. If I say, "Don't think about purple horses," the first thing that comes to mind is purple horses and it's hard to get them out of your mind. If you say to a person, "Don't go outside," that person will focus on going outside. Instead of saying, "Don't go outside," say, "Let's please stay inside." If an individual is performing a task incorrectly, suggest a different way by saying, "Let's try it this way." Always praise the person and thank them for his or her help completing a task.

5) Be aware of your non-verbal communication. Persons with dementia are very sensitive to your tone of voice and body language. If you say, "Don't worry, we have plenty of time," while you tap your foot, they will believe the foot tapping, not your words. Make sure your non-verbal communication is matching what you are saying, as this will often times help the individual understand your message.

**"It is more important to know what person the disease has, than what disease the person has." --Quote from Hippocrates**

While it is important to understand how dementia affects the person, you must remember that each person with dementia is first and foremost an individual. Because of their individuality, their communication patterns will likely differ. But by knowing the person's individual life story and utilizing appropriate techniques, you will be in a much better position to communicate effectively.

If you have specific questions that you would like answered in an upcoming issue of this newsletter please reach out to Monica Kuehl, RN, BSN, Director of Marketing @ [m.kuehl@arborsprings.org](mailto:m.kuehl@arborsprings.org) or 515-223-1135 and I'll do my best to get to them all.