

How to Take Care of our Elders With Dementia

Educational Pamphlet for Care Giver

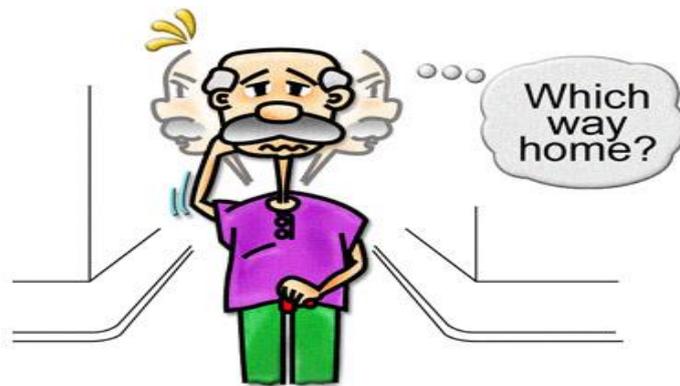


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Dementia

1. Definition:

Dementia is a large group of disorders due to progressive neurodegenerative changes of the brain characterized by memory impairment, loss of communication skills, and gradual deterioration in a person's ability to carry out daily activities. The disease also affects mood, emotions and behavior. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type and there is no cure for the problem at present nor can its progression be reversed. The disease typically progresses into stages which affects each individual differently. The symptoms, the order of presentations and the duration of each stage vary from person to person. However, current medication options and non-pharmaceutical interventions may slow the progression of the disease.

2. The 10 Warning Signs:

If the elder under your care have the following problems, he might be suffering from dementia:

1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems
3. Difficulty in completing familiar tasks at home, work or leisure
4. Confusion with time or place
5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships
6. New problems with words in speaking or writing
7. Misplacing things and losing their ability to retrace steps
8. Decreased or poor judgment
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities
10. Changes in mood and personality



3. Possible changes and challenges that may occur during each stage:

3.1 Early stage:

It is easy to miss the early stage as the person may be incorrectly labelled as "old age". As the onset of the disease is gradual, it is difficult to identify exact time it begins. The person may:

- Show difficulties with language
- Experience significant memory loss – especially short term
- Forget personal care tasks by bathing less or wearing the same clothes repeatedly.
- Forget which tap is for hot water and which one is for cold water
- Forget where they put the personal belongings and frequently search for things
- Ask repeatedly why they have to get dressed.

Try to keep personal care on a set schedule but be aware that there will come a time when the schedule will not work. Most people will likely retain many of their abilities and require minimal assistance for their personal care.

3.2 Middle stage:

For the person in the middle stage (also referred as moderate Alzheimer's disease), there is an increasing loss in their abilities and problems with daily living become evident. Many people may have some awareness of their condition. The person may:

- Become very forgetful, especially of recent events and people's names.
- Have trouble remembering they need to take care of themselves e.g. bathing
- Forget how to use personal care objects e.g toothbrush or hairbrush.
- Need help or reminders to wash or assistance to sequence the activity.
- Feel a loss of control and frustration because of their declining self-care abilities.
- Perceive their caregiver's help as an invasion of personal space because of privacy issues e.g. having the caregiver present in the toilet area.
- Feel embarrassed or humiliated especially when incontinence occurs.
- Become disoriented in space, people and/or time.
- May hide dentures, brushes, combs, etc.

3.3 Late stage:

This stage is one of total dependence and inactivity. Individuals experience need help with all aspects of care, such as personal care, bathing and using the toilet, as well as with other day-to-day activities.

4. Practical tips in caring elders with dementia

Persons with Dementia are still capable of performing self-care activities in a certain extent. They are encouraged to carry out daily living tasks according to their level of ability. To enhance the performance, caregivers should give reinforcement and assistance at appropriate times.

Caring can be very difficult at times. Some general tips are :

- a. Establish routines but keep things normal
Routines reduce decision needed to make, restore structure and order into an otherwise confused life
- b. Support the person's independence
By helping to maintain person's self-respect, it reduces burden on carer
- c. Help the person maintain dignity
Remember the person is still an individual with feelings. Avoid talking about the person without involving them in the conversation
- d. Avoid confrontation
Avoid drawing attention to failure and maintain calm composure
- e. Simplify tasks
Don't offer too many choices
- f. Maintain a sense of humour
Laughter can be a great stress reliever
- g. Make safety important
To prevent injury, make the home environment safe as possible
- h. Encourage fitness and health
Maintain physical and mental abilities by engaging in exercise
- i. Make the best of person's existing abilities
Planned activities enhance a person's self-worth by giving purpose and meaning to life, especially if related to the person's previous interests eg gardening
- j. Maintain communication
Show patience, love and warmth. Obtain person's attention before speaking. Be aware of your own body language.

k. Use memory aids

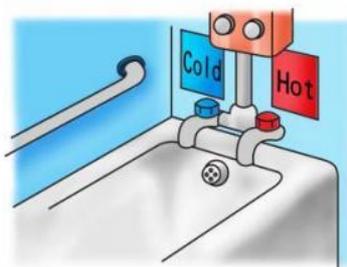
This may be useful in early stages of dementia eg display large clearly labelled pictures of relatives to enable person to keep track of who is who. Label doors with words and bright colours

5 Bathing & Dressing

Unable to Adjust Water Temperature for Bathing / Showering

Encouraging the person with dementia to continue making use of their residual functions helps them retain such abilities and slow down disease progress. Caregivers can help to make sure the task is performed safely:

- Adjust optimal water temperature for dementia person before bath/shower
- Put clear instructions with color cues to indicate hot and cold water on the water taps
- Install standardized thermostat on electrical water boiler to reduce chance of injury



Refusal to Take Bath

Develop a regular bathing routine according to past living habits of person with dementia as consistency in living habits can promote a sense of security.



Mixed-up Bathing Sequences

Caregiver should give clear instructions to dementia person so that they can follow the steps to bathe for themselves. Respecting their dignity and privacy during bathing is essential e.g. installing a shower curtain in bathroom to protect their privacy.



5.1 Dressing

A pleasant appearance of person with dementia can help to promote their self-image. If they need assistance in dressing, caregiver may let them choose clothes they like to wear.

Mixed-up Dressing Sequences

- Arrange the clothes in advance according to the order e.g. put underwear on top of outer clothing.
- Front-opening shirts and blouses are more convenient than crewneck T-shirts
- Dressing aids can be used if necessary e.g. wearing sticks, buttoning aids, long-handled reachers and shoes horn.



Inability to distinguish between Clean & Dirty Clothes

- Place a container in the bathroom for collecting soiled clothing only.
- Teach dementia person to put soiled clothes into the container immediately after changing.

6 Eating

Constant Urge to Eat

Some people with dementia tend to forget that they have eaten, and ask for food constantly. Caregiver can try to:

- Leave a portion of main meal and give them when they request for food.
- Distract them from food by encouraging them to participate in other activities.
- Use food diary to record; arrange small frequent feeds or healthy snacks



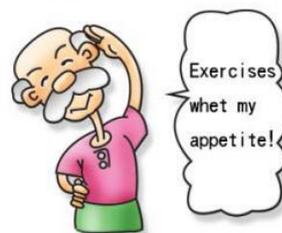
Refusal to Eat

People with Dementia may have poor appetite due to various reasons e.g. illness, depression, delusions or hallucinations. Do not force them to eat or they may develop negative feelings towards eating. Caregiver can try:

- Provide favourite foods based on the principle of healthy and balanced diet.
- Provide nutritional food which are easily digestible
- If they are agitated and refuse to eat, distract them to other activities and continue eating when they calm down
- Seek medical advice if client has drastic change in body weight.

Difficulty in Manipulating Eating Utensils

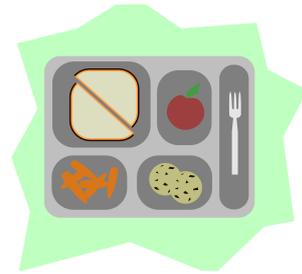
- Replace the chopsticks with spoons if patients are clumsy in using chopsticks.
- Simplify eating utensils
- Provide eating aids if necessary e.g. spoons and forks with enlarged handles



Difficulty in swallowing

Signs & Symptoms:

- Decrease in appetite and body weight
- Drooling
- Wet or gurgly voice after eating
- Coughing, choking and breathlessness after eating
- Unable to empty food in mouth after swallowing



Caregivers can try:

- Help client to fix dentures in proper position, maintain oral hygiene before and after meal
- Check food emptying in mouth after each swallowing
- Arrange a quiet environment to reduce distraction
- Maintain correct position when eating
- Use small spoon to feed if necessary, allow sufficient time for chewing and swallowing
- Prompt step-by-step if client can still feed himself

7 Drug non-compliance

People with dementia should take their prescribed drugs according to doctors' instructions. To assist them independently in taking their medication on time, caregivers may try the following methods:

- Put the appropriate dosage of medications in a medication box
- Make use of timetables, alarm clocks, pagers or the phone to remind them to take their drugs on time.
- Constantly remind and supervise them in taking their drugs, to avoid over- or under-consumption.



8 Managing behavioral and psychological problems

People with dementia may behave oddly, and caregivers may not understand them. In fact, there must be some reasons behind why they act like this. We should understand the underlying causes of their behavior, and use appropriate techniques to manage their condition.

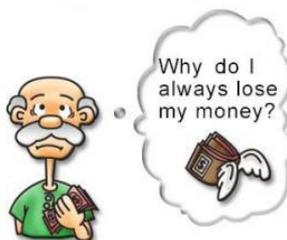
8.1 Yelling & Screaming



Suggestions:

- Distract them with other activities.
- Understand the causes of yelling and screaming and try to satisfy their needs.
- Do not encourage or reinforce this behavior.

8.2 Suspicion

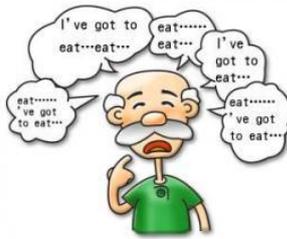


Suggestion:

- Do not argue with them, as this may increase their resistance towards you.
- Do not mind the accusations made by clients, because they have little control or understanding of why they feel bad about you.
- Convey your care and concern to gain person and carers' trust in you.
- Use light music to calm their agitated emotions.
- Shift their attention if they persist in blaming and accusations.

8.3 Repetitive Speech

Repeat questioning or calling out is often a sign of anxiety or insecurity.



Suggestions:

- Try to reassure them to reduce anxiety
- Understand the underlying reasons for such behaviors, e.g. is it due to forgetfulness or simply seeking attention from carers?
- Shift their attention to meaningful tasks
- Talk about their favourite topics

8.4 Incontinence

People with dementia may have incontinence. Common causes for incontinence include deterioration of continued toileting habits, inability to locate the toilet, and reduced ability in undressing.

Suggestions:



- Establish a toileting routine for the client to reduce incidents of incontinence.
- Provide clients with clothing that can be easily put on and taken off.
- Post a sign on the door of the toilet to help clients recognize the location easily.
- In case of nocturnal urination, put a commode next to bed, or switch on a night light so as to help clients to find the way to toilet.

8.5 Wandering Around & Getting Lost



Suggestions:

- Shut the main door, or install a safety alarm system
- Always have family or friends accompany clients when they go out.
- Inform security guards or neighbors of the client's condition so they may be more aware of client's wandering behavior.
- Arrange client to wear a name tag which contains contact details of the caregivers.

9 Home Safety

Persons with Dementia may have certain degree of deterioration in their body capacity, senses, decision-making ability, memory and judgments. This commonly results in increased risk of domestic accidents. It is important to take measures to ensure home safety:

- To prevent falls, reduce the number of unnecessary objects and decoration.
- Ensure sufficient lighting in room.
- Avoid frequent changes in home environment e.g. movement of furnitures.
- Avoid installing full-length mirrors and glass panels to reduce clients' confusion.
- Telephones should be brightly colored and have big buttons
- A phone list of relatives, friends and other important parties should be placed next to the telephone for emergency use.
- Common possessions such as glasses, dentures, hearing aids and drugs should be placed in easily reached areas. It should be labeled appropriately for easy discrimination.
- Prepare big and clear calendars, diaries and notice boards



The End