

***Effects of dementia on
communication and
eating and drinking***

***Information for
people with dementia,
their family and carers***

Communication – common difficulties

- May forget names of people, places and things.
- May be confused and find it difficult to concentrate on the topic of conversation.
- May find it difficult to distinguish between past and present events.
- May have an altered sense of reality.
- May forget recent events and conversations.
- May ask the same question repeatedly.
- May find it harder to process information and reason.
- May forget how to do common everyday tasks, like bathing, dressing, cooking, etc.
- May feel upset/distressed but do not remember why and attribute this to something else.
- May communicate stress and distress non-verbally which may result in withdrawn or challenging behaviour.
- May or may not realise there is a problem. Being aware of a problem may cause frustration.

Communication – how you can help

- Reduce distractions and make sure you have the person's full attention before starting a conversation.
- Use simple, direct, but adult language. Be clear and explicit when you change the topic of conversation.
- Use short sentences.
- Repeat or rephrase something if you feel they have not understood.
- Listen carefully and allow them time to speak.
- If the person does not understand a question try giving them choices, for example, "do you want tea or coffee?" rather than "what do you want to drink?".
- Use Yes/No questions.
- Be specific with times, places and people, such as 'Mary', 'John', 'Union Street' rather than 'she', 'he', 'it'.
- Don't continually correct the person. It's okay to go along with their altered sense of reality if it is not upsetting for the person.
- Support memory by using written words and pictures.

Eating and drinking – common difficulties

- May not recognise the look or smell of the food/drink as they did before.
- May not realise that there is food/drink in their mouth.
- May find it difficult to judge the amount of food/drink to take at one time.
- May forget when they last ate and when to eat next.
- May find it difficult to chew and swallow food/drink.
- May not recognise when they are hungry or thirsty.
- May find it physically difficult and/or forget how to use cutlery.
- May be easily distracted by their environment.
- The ability to eat and drink safely can also be affected by: medication, oral health, condition of their teeth/dentures, and other chronic or acute health conditions such as breathing problems or infections.

Eating and drinking – how you can help

- Create a calm, relaxing environment.
- Involve the person in preparing the meal if appropriate, such as setting the table.
- If possible allow choices of food, use a picture menu.
- Make sure that the person is sitting upright and is comfortable.
- Make sure the person is wearing hearing aids/glasses/dentures as usual.
- Reduce distractions in the environment.
- Make sure that they can see and smell the food/drink.
- Maintain as much independence as possible; consider finger foods to allow the person to feed themselves.
- Describe the food/drink to them – to help the person anticipate the flavour.
- If help is needed, give them time to swallow between mouthfuls and check their mouth is clear at the end of the meal.
- Offer a gentle reminder to swallow if they become distracted.

Eating and drinking - how you can help (continued from previous page)

- Give reassurance and encouragement.
- Use familiar objects such as the person's cup.
- Consider the person's preferred times to eat.
- Consider the person's favorite food and drink at mealtimes. Take into account that the person's taste may change over time and so their preferred foods may change.
- Gently bring the person's focus back to the meal if needed.

Useful websites and apps

Alzheimer's Scotland:
www.alzscot.org

Alzheimer Scotland offers a wide range of support services for people with dementia and their carers.

Their local newsletters list all important contacts, groups and social events happening in your area.

To join their email list, contact: 01261 819066 for Aberdeenshire or 01224 644077 for Aberdeen City.

Dementia UK:

www.dementiauk.org

Alzheimer's Research UK:

www.alzheimersresearchuk.org

The Alzheimer's Society:

www.alzheimers.org.uk

Playlist for Life:

www.playlistforlife.org.uk

Apps:

There is a wide selection and these suggestions may not be suitable for all people with dementia so do some research before purchasing.

- MindMate.
- Alzheimer's society - talking point.
- Clevermind.
- Alzheimer's dementia day clock.

Please note that NHS Grampian is not responsible or liable for the quality of the information, resources or maintenance of external websites. Any advice on external websites is not intended to replace a consultation with an appropriately qualified medical practitioner

Contact telephone number

If you have any questions about communication or eating and drinking, you can contact:

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This leaflet is also available in larger print.

Other formats and languages can be supplied on request. Please call Quality Development on 01224 554149 for a copy. Ask for leaflet 1629.

Feedback from the public helped us to develop this leaflet. If you have any comments on how we can improve it, please call 01224 554149 to let us know.