

Communicating with an Alzheimer's Patient

- As Alzheimer's disease affects each area of the brain, certain functions or abilities can be lost. It is important for caregivers to remember that changes in a person's behavior and ability to communicate may be related to the disease process.
- Alzheimer's disease has a profound effect on language. The disease affects speech and the use of words, as well as the understanding of words. As the disease progresses, language as a means of communicating becomes less effective. Caregivers need to use different ways of communicating their message and staying in touch.
- When speaking to an Alzheimer's patient make sure there are few distractions. It is easier to communicate if other things are not happening at the same time. Television or Radio should be turned off.
- The tone of your voice is very important in speech. Speak slowly and articulate to help the person hear and process the words. Sit facing or stand in front of the person and make eye contact.
- Use gestures and facial expressions when trying to communicate. Be aware; a harsh glance is just as negative as a harsh word. Holding hands or giving a hug are ways of showing affection and acceptance. Smile whenever possible.
- Simplify each task into single steps. Use simple words and short sentences to convey your message. Do not overwhelm the person with a string of instructions. If a person has difficulty hearing, lower the pitch of your voice rather than increasing the volume.
- Begin each sentence by using the patient's name. Always introduce yourself by using your name because the person may not remember who you are.
- Do not assume the person cannot understand you. Patients with severe language deficiency may fluctuate in their abilities. It is inconsiderate and demeaning to talk about the person as though he/she is not present.
- The quality of life for people suffering from Alzheimer's disease is largely dependent on their interactions and relationships with others. It's important to treat the person as an adult and with respect.



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