

## Further information

Dementia – “The Communication Disease”  
by Professor Alison Wray

This short video is very clear and helpful  
for people and families living with  
dementia. Search on YouTube or use the  
link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uu63PqWGaU>

## Support groups and advice:

**Age UK:** [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

Advice line: 0800 678 1602 or ask in your  
local Age UK charity shop.

**Dementia UK:** [www.dementiauk.org](http://www.dementiauk.org)

Dementia helpline: 0800 888 6678

**Alzheimer’s Society:**

[www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

National helpline: 0333 150 3456

Oxfordshire helpline: 01235 531989

Email: [oxford@alzheimers.org.uk](mailto:oxford@alzheimers.org.uk)

## Concerns and complaints

We aim to provide you with a high quality  
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any concerns, complaints or comments  
about your experience of our service then  
please tell a member of the team or  
contact the Patient Advice and Liaison  
Service on freephone 0800 328 7971.

If you would like to have information translated  
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[EqualityandInclusion@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk](mailto:EqualityandInclusion@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk)

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Portuguese Queira contactar-nos se pretender as informações  
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Speech and Language Therapy

# Communication and Dementia

Dementia is a progressive condition. It affects memory and thinking, which leads to communication difficulties. Dementia affects people differently. You may find some or all of the following tasks become more difficult over time: expressing yourself, concentrating, understanding what people say, reading and writing.

You may find that you:

- cannot always find the words you need
- forget names, facts and recent events
- get mixed up when trying to explain or tell a story
- forget what you were talking about or lose track of the conversation
- cannot always process what people are saying to you
- no longer read or write like you used to

These changes to communication can feel unsettling and can lead to frustration. It is important to note, dementia is a progressive condition which causes difficulties remembering and thinking. These skills are needed for communication, so unfortunately this also gets harder over time.

The Adult Speech and Language Therapy service in Oxfordshire is currently not commissioned to provide therapy sessions for communication difficulties caused by dementia. However, the strategies in this leaflet can help you to retain your abilities for longer and compensate for lost abilities. This can help to make communication easier and more enjoyable. **It is very important to enlist the support of the people closest to you.** They can support you by helping you remember strategies, and by using the strategies themselves when talking to you.

## Ideas and advice

Consider telling people about your diagnosis if you feel comfortable. This can reduce embarrassment if you forget a name or make mistakes.

## Concentration and comprehension

- When speaking reduce distractions e.g. turning off the radio/TV, or moving away from people's conversations.
- It is easier to understand when people speak slowly, using short sentences.
- When someone has not understood you fully, they should say what they have understood and check with you to see if it is right.

## Talking and expressing yourself

- People living with dementia can find it difficult to think of what to talk about. Others should be prepared to take the lead and start up conversations themselves.
- Mistakes and memory lapses are to be expected. Try to be patient with yourself. The important thing is for you to be able to express your thoughts. You will be at your best when feeling calm and rested. When feeling upset or frustrated, communication will be more difficult.
- If you cannot think of a word, describe it or use a gesture.
- Others should be patient and allow extra time for you to express yourself, as this can take longer than it used to.
- Others should avoid speaking for you, but can make suggestions and check with you whether it is right.

## Top tips for communication partners (carers, friends and family members)

- Avoid drawing attention to mistakes and memory lapses. If the person says something which seems off-topic, respond to this before returning to your question.
- Follow the lead of the person in conversation. They may enjoy telling old stories from their past, even though you may have heard them before.
- Provide support and prompting tactfully when you notice the other person is becoming frustrated.

## Advanced dementia

In the late stages, some people lose the ability to understand and to use language. They may no longer be able to follow instructions or use speech to communicate. They will be reliant on others to support them. You can still connect with the person by using touch, eye contact and facial expression. Although they may not understand the words that you say, they may respond to your tone of voice.