



Alzheimer's Disease: Communication Tips

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The most debilitating and indicative symptom of Alzheimer's disease is the gradual loss of words and understanding that are crucial to even the most basic communication that most of us take for granted. Alzheimer's patients realize there is a problem, even though they may not have the capacity to understand what is happening. "This can cause instances of confusion, fright and frustration for the person with Alzheimer's disease as well as for loved ones and caregivers of those with Alzheimer's," says Leslie Knopp, Owner of Comfort Keepers in Traverse City.

In an effort to help those dealing with seniors with Alzheimer's, the Alzheimer's Association suggests the following tips to achieve better communication in spite of the disease.

First, it is important to learn to recognize the changes in communication and behavior in those with Alzheimer's. Second, caregivers and family members need to learn how to assist in communication and to identify and adapt their own communication styles to those of the individual Alzheimer's sufferer.

It is important to not only be patient but also supportive when trying to communicate. Take the time to listen with no interruptions or criticisms. Offer encouragement and reassurance that he or she can take the time needed to try to form thoughts into proper words and try to resist correcting misused words. Many times there is meaning behind those words and if you take the time you may discover the intended meaning. Focus on the emotion that may lie within the words. Nuances in voice tone as well as hand gestures and facial expressions can all be critical in fully understanding the senior.

At times you may become angry or frustrated, yourself, but understand that criticizing or arguing only serves to increase levels of discomfort and agitation for those with Alzheimer's. Instead, practice patience and offer occasional suggestions for words they are trying to speak. When appropriate, retreat to a quiet place to communicate. Noise and crowds may intimidate the Alzheimer's patient, resulting in increased frustration and anxiety as well as decreased verbalization. Sometimes, all the person needs is a bit of quiet to organize their thoughts and correctly verbalize them.

If the sufferer is in late stages of Alzheimer's there are other measures you can take to improve communication efforts. Let the person know who you are to create a sense of familiarity. Use simple words and sentences and speak slowly in a lowered tone of voice. Be prepared to repeat your questions or information you are imparting, and also be prepared for those with

Alzheimer's to repeat themselves. Be respectful, calm and caring in your actions and tone of voice. Using signals or written words to communicate or as reminders can be extremely helpful.

Above all, try to remain positive even in the face of this difficult condition. Alzheimer's disease is extremely trying for the patient and the caregiver, family members and friends who are dealing with a loved one with Alzheimer's disease. "Remember, the challenges are neither your fault nor theirs," says Knopp. Patience, understanding and compassion on your part can mean the difference between failure and success in effective communication.

About Comfort Keepers

With over 650 independently owned and operated locations, Comfort Keepers is a leader in in-home senior care to promote independent living. Services include companionship, meal preparation, light housekeeping, grocery shopping, incidental transportation, laundry, recreational activities, personal care and technology products. To locate a Comfort Keepers in your area go to www.comfortkeepers.com.