

Managing Changes: Communication

Also available in Italian | Disponibile anche in italiano

This is a resource for the Italian community. It was developed together with caregivers of people living with dementia within the Italian community in Canada. A caregiver could be a family member, friend, or another person who is supporting a person living with dementia.

This resource provides information about:

- ✓ Common changes with communication, and related strategies for people living with dementia and caregivers
- ✓ Speech-language therapy



Changes with communication

People living with dementia often experience changes with communication. This can include difficulty finding the words, remembering names and other details, understanding what others are saying, or for people who are bilingual, losing the ability to communicate in their second language. There are strategies and services that can help.

What you might notice:	Strategies for people living with dementia:	Strategies for caregivers:
<p>Difficulty finding the right word</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Point or demonstrate the action. E.g., demonstrate brushing your teeth if you can't think of the word "toothbrush". ● If you can't find the right word, talk about the meaning of the word. ● Take your time. It's harder to think of the words if you are feeling rushed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Give the person time and listen patiently. ● Be "person-centered" and adjust to what the person needs in the moment. It may be best to just listen or it may be helpful to suggest a word. ● Avoid correcting the person, unless they ask for help.
<p>Repeating phrases and questions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Write down answers to frequently asked questions to reference. E.g., "tennis is on Tuesday at noon". ● Use memory aids. E.g., notebooks, calendars and/or whiteboard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Answer questions patiently. ● Try to redirect the person to a new topic or activity. ● Avoid getting frustrated, or telling the person they are repeating themselves.

What you might notice:

Strategies for people living with dementia:

Strategies for caregivers:

Difficulty remembering names or other important informations

- Take a list of names of people that will be attending an event with you.
- Ask a friend or family member to remind you of names.
- For important conversations, such as doctor's appointments, bring a list of discussion points/questions.
- Write notes or ask if you can record important conversations.

- Introduce yourself and others. E.g., "your grandson, Matteo is here"
- Use orienting information. E.g., "your sister's house in Calgary".
- Ask the person how you can support them, such as taking notes at appointments.
- **Avoid** questions that require a person to remember. E.g., "do you remember my name?"

What you might notice:

Difficulty understanding others or following conversations

Strategies for people living with dementia:

- Socialize in small groups or one-to-one.
- If you lose track of a conversation, ask the other person to slow down or repeat themselves.
- Take breaks from conversations.
- Avoid background noise and distractions. E.g., turn off the television. If you are meeting someone, choose a quiet location.

Strategies for caregivers:

- Book regular hearing tests and ensure hearing aids are worn.
- Speak to the person face-to-face and make eye contact.
- Focus on one topic at a time.
- Use short, simple and clear sentences.
- Speak slowly, and give lots of time to respond.
- Ask **yes/no** questions and offer limited choices to make it easier to respond. E.g., “coffee or tea?”
- Use positive nonverbal communication to help convey your message. E.g., gesturing, facial expressions and touch.
- **Avoid** using negative body language and tone.

What you might notice:

Going back to one's first language (may be gradual or rapid, and may involve some or complete loss of second language)

Strategies for people living with dementia:

- Use nonverbal communication if speaking is difficult. For example, gesturing, pointing, or facial expressions.

Strategies for caregivers:

If you do not speak the language,

- Use your relationship, intuition, and knowledge of the person's and preferences to understand what they might be saying.
- Try to read emotions and facial expressions.
- Make suggestions, as the person may still understand you. E.g., "are you looking for Dad?"
- Learn key words from the person's first language.
- Use an online translator.
- Use pictures, symbols, and gestures.
- Ask health or social service providers if they have staff that speak the person's language or offer interpretation.

"We managed to find an Italian speaking personal support worker and it was a tremendous help, especially as my mom began to revert back to using more Italian. Having a PSW that could understand her helped take some frustration out of her day and her needs to be met more easily" - Caregiver from the Italian community

Supports and services

Speech therapy is delivered by speech language pathologists. Speech therapy can help people living with dementia with word-finding difficulties, expressing themselves, and understanding others. Speech language pathologists may work with caregivers to improve two-way communication. **Ask your family doctor about a referral.**



Notes

Use this space to write down any notes, reflections, or questions you have about this resource.