



*Treatment and Support for
Families Affected by
Alzheimer's and other
Cognitive Impairments*



Caregiver Network News

A newsletter for caregivers of loved ones with dementia

No Comprendre - How Dementia Affects Language



*I am having trouble coming up with words.
I sometimes use the wrong word for something
familiar.
I often “zone out” and don’t follow or participate in
group conversations.
I seem to miss a lot of what is being said to me.*

All of this indicates that I am having difficulty with language.
And having difficulty with language is a very common symptom of dementia.

It’s often surprising to caregivers and family members to learn that the language center of the brain can sometimes take a big hit from dementia. After all, I am still talking, still using words, still communicating verbally – how could I do all that if my language center isn’t working?

My language center IS still working... but it isn’t working like it used to.

As with most of my other brain functions, my language center is responsible for multiple tasks:

- Finding the right words
- Using and speaking words
- Comprehending words
-

Because dementia has affected my language center, this means that I am likely to have trouble with all of them:

- I may struggle trying to come up with words.
- I am likely to use the wrong word for something I know (i.e., calling a refrigerator a "cold chest" or "the place we keep the milk").
- I am likely to miss a lot of what is said to me. Once you have ruled out hearing impairment or ear wax, it's not that I didn't HEAR it – it's that I didn't UNDERSTAND it.



There's even a word for this condition: APHASIA - "loss of ability to understand or express speech, caused by brain damage."

Aphasia is a common symptom of Alzheimer's and Fronto-Temporal Dementias, but can be typical with other forms of dementia as well. Not everyone with dementia will exhibit the same trouble with language, but it's safe to assume that nearly all of us will be impaired in some way. So it is up to you – the ones who don't have dementia – to be aware of this and to remember that I am living with a very real and challenging disability.

How do you do this? You change how you communicate with me.

The first thing I want you to know is that this is going to be hard – for both of us. We've been talking to each other the same way for a lot of years, so I'm asking you to change something that isn't going to feel natural or normal. I understand that – I don't feel natural or normal a lot of the time myself.

But I hope it will help you to know that, by changing how you talk with me, you are helping me to feel less frustrated – and when my frustration level goes down, so does yours.

Please use less words when you talk to me. I can't hear as fast as I used to. It takes my brain a lot longer to process all the words you throw at me, and when there's too many of them, I just get overwhelmed. Practice reducing what you say down to *one sentence*. For instance, if I ask, "What are we doing today?" please understand that I can't juggle a lot of information. So rather than giving me a whole list of things, please reduce it to one thing at a time, i.e., "We're going to the doctor" or "Running errands." I know there's more we'll be doing, but don't worry, you'll have time to tell me about all that as they come up.

Help me talk around problem words. Nouns and names are usually the first to go. I often know what I need or am looking for, but I can't come up with what it's called. Instead of asking me to name it, help me describe it by asking what it looks like or what I use it for.

Please slow down and give me time to process. It takes me longer these

days to hear what you said, figure out what it means, and come up with a response. I'm losing about every fourth word that you say – is it any wonder that I don't always get it the first time? So please don't rush or interrupt me, I'm trying hard to focus on what you just said. You may just need to simply repeat it for me.

Don't assume I got what you said, even if I say "OK." Sometimes it's just easier for me to say "OK" than to ask you to repeat or explain, because listening to all those words you use is exhausting for me. Besides, I might have short-term memory loss so there's a good chance I won't remember what you said, even if I understood it. So it's kinder – really – just to say the minimum (see No. 1 above).



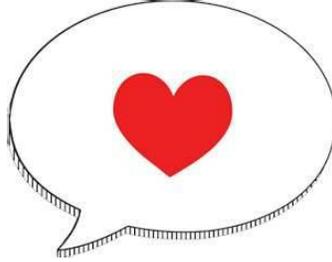
Pay attention to the rest of me, not just what I say. The dementia in my brain has damaged my ability to comprehend the meaning of words. I can hear them, I can speak them, I can usually read them – but that's no guarantee that I understand them. Watch my body language – if I look like a deer in the headlights, or if I don't respond, it could mean that my brain may simply not have processed what you said. Wait a minute, and gently try again. And don't yell – I'm not hard of hearing, I'm hard of comprehending.

Use the words I use when you talk with me. If I like to call the guest room "the company room," please understand that those words, for some reason, make more sense to me in that moment. Using the words I'm comfortable with - even if they're not the usual term or not completely accurate – is one way you can accommodate my language disability.

Look for other ways to keep the lines of communication open.

- What I see is important to me so I'm tuned in to your facial expression and body language (I will pick up very quickly if you are impatient or frustrated with me).
- Touch is important to me (I once heard somebody call it "hug therapy." I like that).
- Things that don't require me to "think" are important to me (music, pictures, prayer, poetry – I like the rhythm of familiar speech even if I don't get all the individual words).
- Lyrics to familiar songs usually work well for me (those are stored in a part of my brain that I can usually access for longer).

Yes, I know we live in a very verbal world. But I live in the world of dementia, and the more it progresses, the more difficulty I will have with words. Please try to keep that in mind when you are communicating with me. I want to stay connected with you, even after I lose them.



Related articles from past issues of CNN:

[*Good Answers to Tough Questions*](#) (Mar-April 2017)

[*Answering Difficult Questions*](#) (May-June 2019)

Caregiver Tips

Crazy Sock Day

Dad used to be grumpy in the mornings and often didn't want to cooperate when it was time to get dressed. We hit on the idea of buying him several pairs of colorful socks with fun designs on them. Now we bring out a couple of pairs of his "Crazy Socks" each morning and let him choose which ones he wants to wear that day. He enjoys the designs and often cracks a joke about them ("These have stars, that must mean I'm a star!"). He also enjoys showing them off to everyone he sees that day, and now people often ask him about them. This has made such a difference in our morning routine!



Notable Quotable

"Talk low, talk slow, and don't say too much."

- John Wayne



Ongoing Programs
Open to the Public



MEMORYCAREGIVERS NETWORK
Peer Support & Education Groups

FLETCHER GROUP

First Tuesdays, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Fletcher 7th Day Adventist Church
Howard Gap Road and Naples Road, Fletcher, NC
(just past Park Ridge Hospital)

NEW HOPE GROUP

Third Tuesdays, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

New Hope Presbyterian Church
3070 Sweeten Creek Road, Asheville, NC 28803
(across from Givens Estates)

NORTH ASHEVILLE GROUP

Fourth Tuesdays, 1:00-3:00pm

Newbridge Baptist Church
199 Elkwood Avenue and Merrimon Avenue, Asheville NC 28804
(enter at glass doors adjacent to the gym)

Network meetings are open to the public.

The Network relies on charitable support to keep its program going.

TO MAKE A DONATION, [CLICK HERE](#)

For more information about the MemoryCaregivers Network, contact:

Mary Donnelly
828.230.4143

Pat Hilgendorf
828.301.0740



"Caregiver College" MemoryCare's ongoing education series for caregivers

Caregiver College is a series of six lectures containing crucial information for anyone

caring for a person with a memory disorder.

The program is taught by a MemoryCare physician, and is designed to improve caregiver understanding of different aspects of dementia care. Related presentation materials will be provided.

There is no cost for families who are enrolled in MemoryCare. For those not enrolled, the cost is \$180 for the 6-part series. Scholarship funds are available, let us know when you register if you require scholarship assistance.

Registration is required, and space is limited.

To register, please call our office at 828.771.2219

Course Content:

What Is Dementia?

Transitioning from Independence to Interdependence

Functional and Behavioral Changes of Dementia

Dementia Treatment Options & Risk Reduction

Caring for the Caregiver

Dementia and Legal Planning Issues

*Caregiver College is held at
SECU Center for MemoryCare
100 Far Horizons Lane, Asheville
(located on the campus of Givens
Estates off Sweeten Creek Rd)*

***The next Asheville session of Caregiver College will begin
Spring of 2020***

Watch this space for details!



Do you need a program for a group event?

The MemoryCaregivers Network staff presents on a variety of subjects, including Recognizing Early Warning Signs of Memory Loss, Facts and Fiction about Dementia, Better Communication Techniques, and more.

We are happy to speak at your event to raise awareness and knowledge about Dementia.

Contact Mary Donnelly at network@memorycare.org

To see a list of
OTHER COMMUNITY RESOURCES

[CLICK HERE](#)

Caregiver Network News and The MemoryCaregivers Network are auxiliary programs of



[We rely on charitable donations to continue these programs!](#)

Please consider donating...
perhaps in honor of a loved one's birthday...
or a memorial...
or a sustaining gift to support families like yours
who depend on the services that MemoryCare provides!

Make a difference. Make a donation.

[Click here to donate.](#)

Thank you for your interest and support!



is a charitable non-profit organization whose mission is three-fold:

To provide specialized medical care to older adults with cognitive impairment;
to support caregivers with education, counseling, and improved access to services; and to provide
community education.

Caregiver Network News is written and edited by Mary Donnelly.
Contact network@memorycare.org for more information.

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