

July 2017

factsheet



The following tips are based on a review of the literature about best ways to interact with a person with dementia. This review included academic articles from 13 countries that were published between 2000 and 2017.

The information presented in this factsheet comes from studies in which these strategies were found to be successful. Due to the changes in mood experienced by persons with dementia, suggestions here may work one day and may not work another, therefore it is important keep trying them and track which ones you use.

Tips on How to Interact with a Person with Dementia

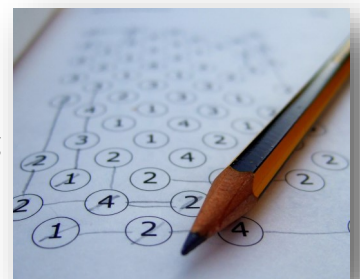
Communication

- ◆ Talk about topics that interest them
- ◆ Use props during conversation, as individuals with dementia have an easier time talking about something they can see
- ◆ When asking questions, give them two or three answers to choose from, such as “yes” or “no”, and avoid open-ended questions, as they may struggle to come up with an answer, causing frustration
- ◆ For those who cannot speak, acknowledge their body language and facial expressions so they feel included



Hobbies and Interests

- ◆ Engage them in an activity that relates to their past hobbies and interests, such as an activity they used to do before moving to long term care
- ◆ For example, individuals who had a farm, may enjoy caring for a small plant, or individuals who were doctors or lawyers may enjoy solving puzzles



Celebrations

- ◆ Celebrate as many family milestones as possible
- ◆ In multiple studies, family was reported by persons with dementia to be the most important part of their lives, and the highlight of their days





Go outside

- ◆ A change of scenery and some sunlight can decrease agitation, and be very enjoyable for everyone
- ◆ Try gardening, interacting with family pets, or sitting and enjoying the fresh air
- ◆ Organize an outing to a church, family member's home, a park, or a historical site nearby

Activities for the brain

- ◆ Helps the person with dementia be more engaging and reduces their feelings of uselessness
- ◆ Can include puzzles, games, quizzes, reading and practical tasks such as folding clothes or dusting together.



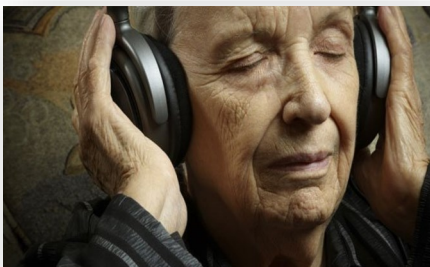
Food

- ◆ Bring them their favourite foods as familiar tastes and smells can spark pleasant memories of meals at home, and time with family



Reminiscing

- ◆ Asking about the individuals past provides a topic for meaningful discussion which improves their mood and makes them feel proud
- ◆ Create a memory box; a box of pictures, poems and small items that the relative can keep in their room and look at whenever they want



Music

- ◆ Sing, dance, play or listen to music together
- ◆ Certain songs can remind the person with dementia of happy times in their life and improve their mood



Additional Thoughts to Consider

A common misunderstanding among family caregivers of persons with dementia is the level of awareness these individuals have. In fact, many caregivers state the reason they may not engage their relative in activities is they do not know enough about dementia itself. Research shows that individuals with dementia, including those who cannot speak, do understand what is going on around them, and are able to interact with visitors in many ways.