

Practical tips for interacting with a person with dementia

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Overview

- What is communication
- How dementia affects communication
- Improving communication
- Case studies

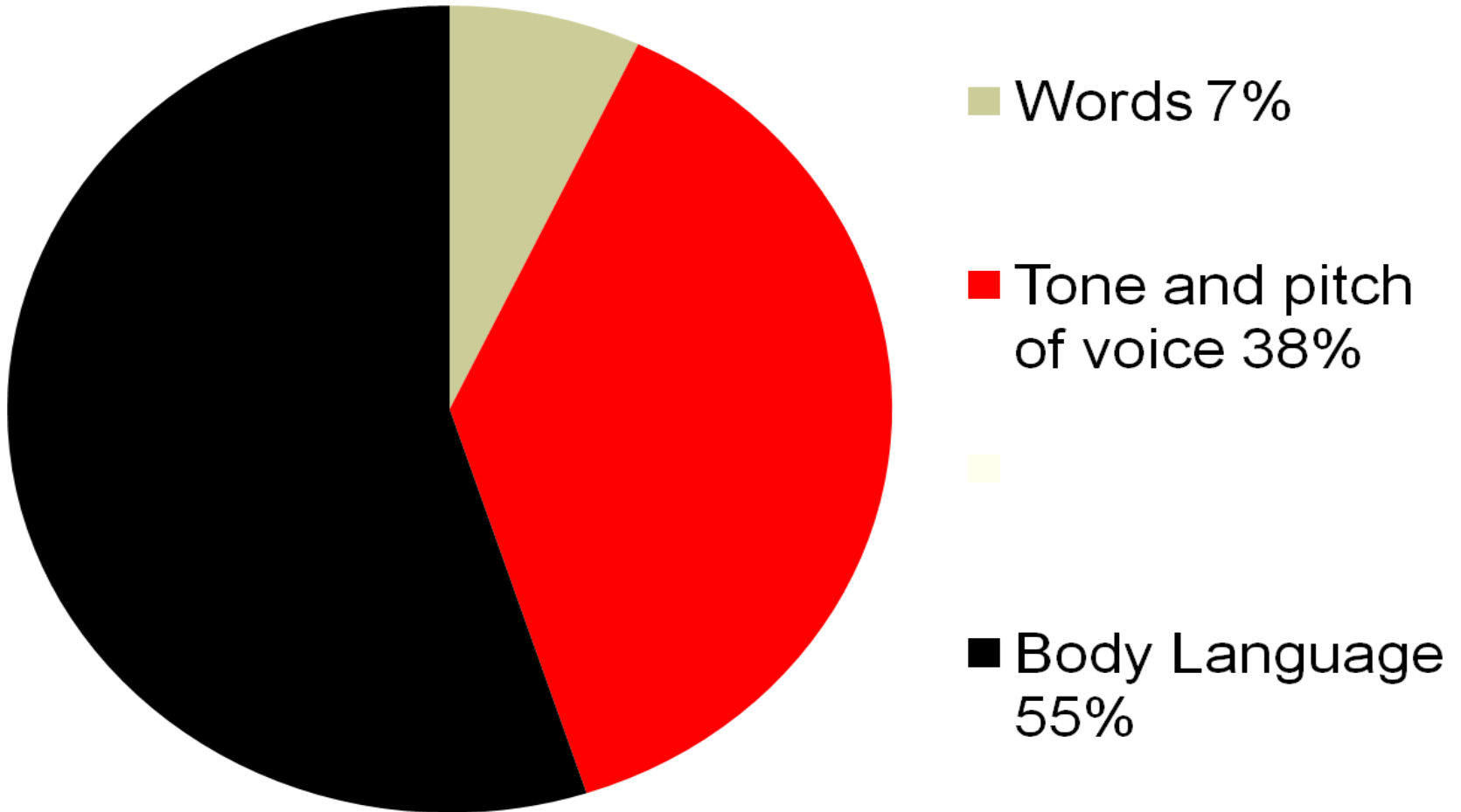
What is communication?

How we get and give information

- How we make ourselves understood
- How we understand others
- How we make our needs and feelings known

Communication is how we develop and maintain relationships

How we communicate



How dementia may impact on communication

- Inability to find the right word – may use alternative or incorrect words
- Difficulty understanding what being said
- Difficulty in using logical sentences
- Short term memory issues affecting ability to maintain conversation
- Avoidance of distressing topics
- Fear of saying the wrong thing

Potential changes in communication_contd.

- Repeated utterance of particular words or phrases
- Slurred speech
- Loss of insight and judgement
- Using curse words
- Persistent talking

Some Dos and don'ts of communication

Don't :

- Correct the person
- Give too much information in one sentence
- Start a sentence with 'Do you remember?'
- Ask more than one question at a time

Do

- Give the person time
- Give options (but not too many)
- Be patient and reassuring
- Offer a guess (but not too many)
- Speak clearly
- Give your name – it reassures

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjpMOKJ1yYI>
- Still Kathy - Give the person time

Communication and the environment

The physical environment can impact on a person with dementia's ability to concentrate and communicate

'Background noise makes me exhausted to follow the thread of what is happening and I become very tired.....'

'Noise feels like an egg beater in my head scrambling what is in there....sounds can become a hubbub and I can't make out what people are saying to me'



- 'All I hear is whatever sound is loudest and this bangs around my head, bruising my brain, grating against any thoughts or words that are there' **Christina Bryden, Dancing with Dementia**

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=sound+and+dementia

Sounds of dementia

Noise and dementia

- Create a calm and soothing environment
- Ensure loud background music from radio or television is not causing distraction or distress
- Check that person is not distracted by other people or activities
- If two people are working with a person, ensure only one person speaks at a time

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAW1khJiJiw>
- Still Kathy - Communication environment

Some other ways of improving communication

- Don't rush the person
- Wait for a response
- Repeat your statement or question
- Use short, simple, familiar words

Improving communication contd.

- **Use statements or actions instead of questions** (where possible)
- Saying “Here is the toilet” pointing to the toilet door may be better than repeatedly asking “Do you need to use the bathroom?”
- ***Show don't tell*** - Demonstrating or beginning a task may be more helpful than verbally communicating it

Improving communication contd.

- Brightly coloured signs with pictures may help the person understand the environment



Improving communication contd.

- Enter the person's reality - it doesn't matter if the information is inaccurate
- Go with the flow of the interaction
- Acknowledge what the person is feeling
- Comfort the person if they are upset or anxious

Improving communication contd.

Long term memories often preserved so talking about the past can be really effective

Benefits of reminiscence :

- Helps build rapport, other tasks may then be easier
- Increases confidence
- Can help reassure or distract the person

Reminiscence

- Old photos
- Life story book
- Old songs
- Old poems
- Familiar smells



The medium isn't important – the connection is

Communication is always possible

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvaCgnFP6Mo> Still Kathy – Communication is always possible
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrZXz10FcVM> Naomi and Gladys - Start at 2.46

Case study 1

- John

84 year old man with advanced vascular dementia,

Fully dependent for all ADLs

Became agitated during personal care and hoisting

Inclined to grab carers arms, squeeze tight

Two carers, increasingly difficult to perform personal care

What we did.....

- Spoke to wife, identified soothing music John enjoyed
- **One** home carer explaining exactly what happening to John at a time – ‘ John I am washing under your arm, John we are sitting you forward’
- Person speaking ensuring they had eye contact before speaking
- Spoke very clearly

- Only one person doing something with John at a time (where possible)
- In between information giving, soothing reassurance provided
- Private man – ensured towel covering him at all times
- Ball for hand

Case study 2

- Maura, 72 year old woman with advanced Alzheimers Disease
- Fully mobile, dependent for ADLS
- Issue : Carer had extreme difficulty getting Maura to get out of bed, became very agitated with attempts to remove clothes

What we did.....

- Carer starting session saying 'do you remember me?', trying to coax, reason/rationalise reasons to get out of bed
- Changed to making eye contact and saying 'Good morning Maura, Im Mary, Its time to get out of bed'
- Repeat 'Maura, Its time to get out of bed'(some manoeuvring of bedclothes required)
- Hand holding, soothing rubbing,walk to toilet

- Carer very obviously sat on toilet, then said clearly 'Its time to sit on the toilet'
(Manoeuvre to remove trousers required)
- Finished – 'Its time to wipe yourself' (Show don't tell)
- Up to bedroom to change clothes. ++reassurance required to take off clothes (warm room essential)
- Show don't tell used again to wash Maura and get her to dress herself
- Reassurance and soothing voice throughout (except when telling Maura what happening)