

Alzheimer's Caregiving: Changes in Communication Skills

Communication is hard for people with [Alzheimer's disease](#) because they have trouble remembering things. They may struggle to find words or forget what they want to say. You may feel impatient and wish they could just say what they want, but they can't. Here are some suggestions from the National Institute on Aging.

The person with Alzheimer's may have problems with finding the right word or losing his or her train of thought when speaking. Other examples are understanding what words mean,

paying attention during long conversations, or remembering the steps in [common activities](#), such as cooking a meal, paying bills, or getting dressed.

The first step is to understand that the disease causes changes in communication skills. The second step is to try some tips that may make communication easier: Make eye contact and call the person by name. Be aware of your tone, how loud your voice is, how you look at the person, and your body language. Encourage a two-way conversation for as long as possible.

To encourage the person to communicate with you: Show a warm, loving, matter-of-fact manner. Hold the person's hand while you talk. Be open to the person's concerns, even if he or she is hard to understand. Let him or her make some decisions and stay involved. Be patient with angry outbursts. Remember, it's the illness "talking."

To speak effectively with a person who has Alzheimer's: Offer simple, step-by-step instructions. Repeat instructions and allow more time for a response. Try not to interrupt. Don't talk about the person as if he or she isn't there. Don't speak to the person using "baby talk" or a "baby voice."

Be direct, specific, and positive. Here are some examples of what you can say: "Let's try this way," instead of pointing out mistakes. "Please do this," instead of "Don't do this." "Thanks for helping," even if the results aren't perfect.

You also can ask questions that require a yes or no answer. For example, you could say, "Are you tired?" instead of "How do you feel?" Limit the number of choices. For example, you could say, "Would you like a hamburger or chicken for dinner?" instead of "What would you like for dinner?" Use different words if he or she doesn't understand the first time. For example, if you ask the person whether he or she is hungry and you don't get a response, you could say, "Dinner is ready now. Let's eat."

Try not to say, “Don’t you remember?” or “I told you.” If you become frustrated, take a timeout for yourself.