

# Communication Strategies

People with Alzheimer's or dementia can lose their ability to speak clearly and understand what you are saying. Language and communication abilities change over time as a person progresses through each stage of the disease. This can be frustrating both for the person with Alzheimer's and for you. Always remember that you cannot control memory loss, only your reaction to it. For a person living with dementia, their disability is memory loss.

## Common Challenges

There are many challenges that a person with dementia might face while they are trying to communicate. They may have trouble with:

- Using the correct word & understanding the meaning
- Connecting what they see with what they hear
- Paying attention
- Filtering out background noise
- Repeating questions or phrases
- Using a language that is not their native language

## Techniques for Communication

- **Forgive:** Move past negative reactions and accept blame (even when it is not your fault). Do not take things personally, question their memory, or blame them.
- **Slow Down:** Adjust your expectations. It is possible to try later. Stay happy and affirming. Do not hurry them.
- **Keep it Simple:** Provide brief explanations, repeat instructions or sentences in the same way, and present the person with easy, understandable options.
- **Be Flexible:** Agree and validate the feelings of the person or divert and redirect their attention. Do not try to reason, fight, or convince.



# Maintaining Your Brain Health

## Understanding Anosognosia

Anosognosia is a decline in self-awareness, a condition in which the person living with dementia does not appear aware of that disability. Approximately half of people with dementia do not recognize their own memory loss or changes with their abilities. *It is not useful to try to convince someone that they forgot.*

### Real Life Examples:

#### “Why do I have to go to the doctor? I’m fine.”

- **Advice:** Focus on giving short explanations and accept guilt
- **Response:** “It’s just a regular check-up. I forgot to tell you, I’m so sorry.”
- **Avoid trying to reason:** “You have seen the doctor every three months for the last three years. I wrote it down on the calendar and I told you yesterday and this morning.”

#### “I didn’t write this check for \$500. Someone at the bank is forging my signature.”

- **Advice:** Focus on responding to feelings, reassuring & redirecting
- **Response:** “Oh my goodness, how scary. I’m sorry that happened. Let me see if I can call the bank and get to the bottom of this. This is not okay. While I am looking for the phone number, can you help me fold some towels?”
- **Avoid arguing:** “What are you talking about? That is your signature, see? The bank wouldn’t forget it.”

#### “Nobody is going to make decisions for me. Leave and do not come back!”

- **Advice:** Focus on accepting blame, responding to the person’s feelings, reassuring & redirecting
- **Response:** “I’m sorry this is a tough time. I love you and we are going to get through this together. You know what? Don has a new job. He’s really excited about it.”
- **Avoid arguing:** “I’m not going anywhere, and you cannot remember enough to make your own decisions.”

#### “Who are you? Where is my husband?”

- **Advice:** Focus on being flexible and reassuring
- **Response:** “I am a friend of your husband, Bob. He just went to the store and he’ll be back in time for dinner.”
- **Avoid taking it personally:** “What do you mean ‘where’s your husband?’ I’m right here!”

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