

PCTI Strategies for Caregiving with Someone Living with Dementia

Yuliya Gaydayenko, LMSW, MA

Jewish Family Service of Metropolitan Detroit

Cognition Throughout Lifetime

- At what age do you think our normal cognitive abilities peak?
- After that there are small changes or declines that you probably won't notice until there is a cumulative effect - at what age do you think this would normally happen?
- Age-related changes
 - Memory
 - Language
 - Attention span
 - Processing speeds

Normal Cognitive Decline

- *Slight* cognitive changes are normal as we age:
 - Word retrieval difficulties
 - Slower thought processing
 - Scattered attention
 - Memory difficulties
- Changes are not severe enough to interfere with daily life

Normal

- An occasional poor decision
- Missing a monthly payment
- Forgetting the day/
Remembering later
- Sometimes forgetting a word
- Losing things from time to time

Concerning

- Poor judgment/decision making
- Inability to manage a budget
- Losing track of the date or season
- Difficulty having a conversation
- Misplacing things/unable to retrace steps

(Source: alz.org)

Types of Dementia

- Alzheimer's
 - Most common type
 - Caused by damage to the nerve cells in the brain
 - First characterized by forgetfulness severe enough to effect both work and social life
- Other symptoms include:
 - Confusion
 - Getting lost in familiar places
 - Misplacing things
 - Difficulty organizing and expressing thoughts
 - Changes in personality and behavior

Types of Dementia

- Vascular Dementia
 - Second most common type
 - Occurs when clots block the flow of blood to the brain
- Mild Cognitive Impairment
 - Memory concerns
 - Not severe enough to interfere with daily life
- Lewy Body
 - Caused by abnormal protein deposits in the brain
 - Symptoms include:
 - Memory loss
 - Confusion
 - Difficulty communicating
 - Paranoia
 - Hallucinations
- Other diseases
 - Parkinson's
 - Huntington's

Signs and Symptoms of Dementia

- Forgetting recently learned information and not remembering later
- Problems with Language
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks
 - Especially those we do not normally think about
- Changes in mood or behavior
- Changes in personality
- Loss of initiative

(Source: Boston University Center for Aging and Disability Education and Research)

More to Know

- Functioning levels are not the same (mild to severe)
- Different parts of the brain can be impacted by dementia
- Cookie cutter approach won't work
- Avoid fast forwarding to the worst case scenario until you have to
- Correlation between dementia and trauma

PCTI Care Tips for Caregivers

- It's ok to join in their reality
 - Enhances time together
 - Offers reassurance
- For celebrations:
 - Choose the time of day carefully
 - Plan activities for everyone
 - Choose bright colors
 - Set aside a quiet spot
 - Be aware of mood changes

PCTI Care Tips for Caregivers

- Use visual cues whenever possible
- Prompt with a hand wave saying “Come join me”
- Offering two concrete choices works better than a yes or no question
 - People will often answer “no” when they don’t understand
- Look for opportunities to boost self esteem by thanking them for their efforts

PCTI Care Tips for Caregivers

- Sit in front of something visually stimulating
 - Painting
 - Bird cage
 - Picture window
- Become the narrator
 - Allows you to share the experience without focusing on their deficits
- Try to avoid quizzing or correcting them
- Redirect repetitive questions

PCTI Care Tips for Caregivers

- Suggested television choices include:
 - I Love Lucy
 - America's Funniest Home Videos
- Awareness of self in space deteriorates
 - Remove rocking and swivel chairs
 - Use contrasting colored tape on stair treads and in poorly lit spaces
- Nutrition:
 - Gravitate towards sweets so add Agava or another natural sugar replacement (such as bananas or dates) to vegetables and meat
 - Hydration is a concern
 - Drink with them
 - A cup in their hands will trigger them to sip

Dementia-Related Communication Issues

- Word finding difficulties
- Comprehension declines
- Decreased ability to focus attention
- Loss of train-of-thought
- Decreased auditory discrimination
- Increased sensitivity

PCTI Care for Someone with Communication Issues

- Understand that the disease causes changes in these skills
- Make eye contact to get his/her attention
- Call the person by name
- Encourage a two-way conversation for as long as possible
- Use other methods besides speaking to help the person, such as gentle touching to guide him or her
- Try a distraction such as a fun activity

PCTI Ways to Encourage Communication

- 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 they are hard to understand
- Let him or her make some decisions & stay involved
- Be patient with angry outbursts (remembering it's the illness talking)
- If you become frustrated, take a break
- Use stress management techniques

PCTI Communication Strategies

- Offer simple, step-by-step instructions
 - Repeat instructions
 - Allow more time for a response
 - Try not to interrupt
- Common mistakes:
 - Talking about the person as if he or she isn't there
 - Talking to the person in a baby talk voice

PCTI Communication Strategies

- 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
- Use yes or no questions
- Limit the number of choices

Dementia-related Behavior & Personality Changes

- Observable personality changes:
 - Getting easily upset, worried, & angry
 - Uninterested in things
 - Hiding belongings/believing others are hiding them
 - Imagining things that aren't there
 - Wandering away from home
 - Pacing a lot of the time
 - Showing unusual sexual behavior
 - Hitting
 - Misunderstanding what he or she sees or hear
 - Not interested in appearance or hygiene

Emotional Reasons for Behavioral Changes

- Feelings
 - Sadness
 - Fear
 - A feeling of being overwhelmed
- Stress caused by something or someone
- Confusion after a change in routine, including travel
- Anxiety about going to a certain place/activity

Environmental Causes

- Being in an unfamiliar place
- Too much noise, which can cause confusion or frustration
- Change in flooring
- Misunderstanding posted signs
- Mirrors

PCTI Care Strategies for Behavioral Changes

- Keep things simple
- Stick to a daily routine
- Reassure the person that they are safe & you are there to help
- Focus on his or her feelings rather than words
- Do not argue or try to reason with the person
- Try not to show your anger or frustration
- Provide a safe place to walk

Additional PCTI Care Tips

- Use distractions:
 - Playing music
 - Singing
 - Dancing.

- Ask for help
 - "Let's set the table"
 - "I really need help folding these clothes."

Additional PCTI Care Tips

- Be sure the he/she gets enough exercise each day
- Limit naps
- Be sure the person gets enough rest at night
- Plan activities that use more energy early in the day
- Create a quiet, peaceful mood in the evening to help the him/her relax
- Create a bedtime routine
- Limit caffeine
- Use nightlights in the bedroom, hall, & bathroom

PCTI Care Tips for Hallucinations & Delusions

- Notify the doctor or dementia specialist
 - Recent illness
 - Medications
- Try not to argue about what they see or hear
- Comfort them if they are afraid
- Use distraction techniques
- Turn off the TV during violent or upsetting programming
- Make sure the person is safe & can't reach anything that could be used to hurt self or others

PCTI Care Tips for Hallucinations & Delusions

- Try not to react if the person blames you
- Don't argue with him or her
- Search for missing items to distract the person
 - Talk about what you found
 - For example, talk about a photograph or keepsake

Common Causes of Aggression & Agitation

- Pain, depression, stress or feelings of loss
- Too little rest or sleep
- Constipation
- Soiled underwear or disposable brief
- Sudden change in a well-known place, routine, or person
- Overstimulation
- Being pressured
 - Hygiene
 - Remembering
- Feeling lonely & not having enough contact with people

PCTI Care Tips for Aggression & Agitation

- Tell their physician & family
- Catch it early
- Identify the cause
- Slow down & try to relax
- Allow the person to keep as much control as possible
- Use distraction techniques
- Offer reassurance
- Keep well-loved objects and photographs visible
- Reduce noise, clutter, or the number of people in the room
- Try gentle touching, soothing music, reading, or walks.
- Build quiet times into the day, along with activities.
- Limit the intake of caffeine, sugar, and junk food

PCTI Care Tips for Rummaging & Hiding Belongings

- Lock up dangerous or toxic products, or place them out of the person's sight and reach
- Remove spoiled food from the refrigerator and cabinets
- Remove valuable items that could be misplaced or hidden
- Become familiar with preferred hiding places
- Keep all trash cans covered or out of sight
- Check trash containers before you empty them
- Create a special place for safe rummaging & sorting

Additional Resources

Books

- Still Alice by Lisa Genova
- Alzheimer's From the Inside Out by Richard Taylor, Ph. D
- The 36 Hour Day by Nancy Mace & Peter Rabins
- Learning to Speak Alzheimer's by JoAnn Koenig Coste

PCTI Self-Care for a Caregiver

- Nutrition
- Exercise
- Sleep (an important component in consolidating memories)
- Reduce stress: meditation, breathing, mindfulness activities
- Spirituality
- Socialization
- Creativity ... remembering is a creative process
- Mental Stimulation

Our Brains Need to be Challenged!

- The brain is able to reorganize itself and form new connections to compensate for damage and disease (neuroplasticity).
- Cognitive Training best practices:
 - Targets specific brain functions in a specific order
 - Increases in difficulty and speed
 - 60 minutes at a time
 - 2 times/ week for 12-15 weeks

Cognitive Resiliency Interventions

- SHARE for Dementia - Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging
<https://benrose.org/-/share>
- Mind Aerobics - New England Cognitive Center
<https://www.cognitivecenter.org/>
- Cognitive Stimulation Therapy <https://www.slu.edu/medicine/internal-medicine/geriatric-medicine/aging-successfully/cognitive-stimulation-therapy.php>
- New innovative approaches:
 - Stronger Memory - <https://goodwinliving.org/stronger-memory/>

Mind University

Put Your Best Brain Forward



Jewish Family Service of Metropolitan Detroit



248.592.2300 • jfsdetroit.org

Cognitive Training Classes

- Reaction Time
- Visual Spatial
- Attention/Concentration
- Memory
- Language
- Problem Solving

Cognitive Training Classes

- Fight back against changes to our aging brains...no workout clothes required!
- Curriculum developed by the New England Cognitive Center
- Innovative, evidence-informed program
- Helps adults maintain & stimulate their brains
- Classes organized by cognitive level

Cognitive Training results

Normal Cognition

- Improve in 2-3 domains
- Maintain improvements for 1 year

Dementia/Alzheimer's

- Improve in more areas
- Need follow up to maintain gains
- Follow up is key!

Improvement in Geriatric Depression Score

Contact Information:

Yuliya Gaydayenko, CPO, Older Adult Services

ygaydayenko@jfsdetroit.org

248-592-3962