

A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA

MONEY HANDLING: Sometimes people with dementia have trouble understanding their money. You will see them appearing to struggle to understand the amount they have to pay and to work out the value of each coin. This applies in retail shops, Banks, Post Offices. Patience and understanding will help enormously.

CONFUSION AND STARING: One of the common things that link people with Dementia is "Catatonic Trance". Simply put, it will look like they are daydreaming. If this happens, please just observe and offer help if needed. Also looking or becoming confused is also very common. This happens when the person with Dementia is having a problem focusing on what to do or where to go next. A little gentle re-assurance and an offer of help will always be welcome.

SPATIAL AWARENESS: This is a difficult one. What it actually means is when you can see people stumbling or having trouble walking with ease. It looks sometimes as if the person might have been drinking but when you begin to understand the differences between spatial awareness and other factors you will soon come to realise this is not the case. A person may reach out for something and not quite understand why they haven't been able to get what they want. Also bumping into things and looking very unsure as to where they are putting their next step, you can often see the look of confusion in their eyes. In cases of NON-dementia, they usually look confident but still cannot get to grips with doing the smallest things.

SPEECH: It has long been known that someone with Dementia tends to repeat themselves and will ask you the same thing over and over again. This is where a little patience comes in and a helping hand to take them to what they are looking for. If they can see what they want, usually that will do the trick. Also stammering and stuttering are not always signs of a speech impediment. This can also be signs of dementia. Sometimes people with this illness will try to say something but it will come out completely non-sensical. Other times you will see their sheer frustration at not being able to say what they want to say. Mostly you can tell the difference between people with dementia doing this and others, as those with dementia will look very frustrated and sometimes even angry. People with a speech impediment don't usually show symptoms like this.

REPETITIVENESS: This comes in many forms but the most common form after speech repetitiveness is doing the same action time and time again. This may include putting more than one of the same products in their basket/trolley, or where shops are concerned they may buy the same thing over and over again. A polite mention that the person has duplicated their shopping would not go amiss.

CHECKOUTS: For the larger retail shops when checking out the items bought and sending them down the lane please be aware if a person is having problems keeping up with you. Sometimes the speed the items hit the bottom are enough to confuse an able bodied person, let alone someone with dementia. Please advise checkout operators of this and ask them to slow a little if they see any confusion arising.

TALKING ABOUT DEMENTIA: This is a subject of much discussion. Some people with dementia don't care who knows and others are quite ashamed of having it or are in complete denial. It's YOUR approach that matters here. God forbid you would ever go and ask someone if they had dementia! You wouldn't walk over to anybody and ask them "Are you disabled?" would you? It's the same thing. Always try to keep in mind that Dementia is a debilitating disease of the brain, just as cancer is on the lungs, or heart problems on the heart muscles and so on. It is certainly NOT an AGE RELATED disease as the first person ever to be diagnosed with this was only 52yrs old. Somewhere down the mists of time we have forgotton that.

If someone offers up the information that they have dementia, ask them what kind of dementia, how long they have had it and how well they manage it. Sometimes showing an interest in them will let them know they are not on their own. This is without doubt the "Loneliest Disease" in the world.

The more that people understand this disease and talk about it, the more the stigma that is attached to it will be reduced and eventually be resigned to a distant memory.

Thankyou so much for your understanding and please remember - the person in front of you who is having these troubled times, could one day be you yourself.

Taken from a guide produced by Norman McNamara diagnosed with Dementia four years ago at the age of just 50yrs old.

