

Alzheimer's Disease and Communication

Speech is frequently affected by Alzheimer's disease. An understanding of simple speech often remains intact during the early stages. However, difficulties in locating and expressing correct word usage can begin very early in the course of the disease. The Alzheimer's sufferer may experience difficulty in interpreting complex conversations, proverbs, and metaphors. Because of this, it may become very difficult to construct a complex sentence.

Later, as the Alzheimer's disease progresses, it becomes difficult for the sufferer to complete sentences. The sufferer often moves from one subject to another, often repeat the same words again and again. Writing and reading can be affected in the early stages of the disease often as a result of spelling difficulties. There is also an associated lack of interest in the task involved, therefore, tasks are very often left uncompleted.

The taking of telephone messages can prove particularly difficult. Difficulty with this seemingly simple task is often the catalyst for the initial discovery of the dementia. The typical Alzheimer's disease sufferer would have difficulty following a conversation. The realisation that they are having such difficulties causes them become more confused and frightened, thereby worsening the problem.

As the Alzheimer's disease increases in severity, communication problems increase. With the decrease in the ability to locate appropriate words to complete a sentence or to become involved in a conversation, the Alzheimer's sufferer may add paraphasias, or other words, as fillers to the remaining gaps. This usually results in the loss of a conversation's true meaning. Comprehension skills also decrease with the disease's increasing severity. Questions may not get answered, because they are not understood, following the thought through to completion in a sentence often proves too difficult and the sufferer is overwhelmed by common swift changes of subject matter.

Eventually, when speech mainly consists of babbling gibberish, gradually the Alzheimer's sufferer will withdraw from talking altogether. In advanced stages of the disease, the sufferer is unable to communicate to others even their basic needs. In a few Alzheimer's sufferers, there may be some occasional automatic verbal response, but often by this point the burden of communication typically falls on the shoulders of relatives, friends and caregivers.