

Understanding Dementia: Implications for Emergency Preparedness and Response

June 5th, 2018

Melissa Grenier, LCSW, CDP
Regional Manager, New Hampshire
Alzheimer's Association MA / NH Chapter

alzheimer's  association®

Topics

- Overview of various forms of dementia
- Communication challenges and ways to connect
- Understanding difficult behaviors
- Strategies for managing dementia-related challenges during urgent situations

alzheimer's  association®

What is Dementia?

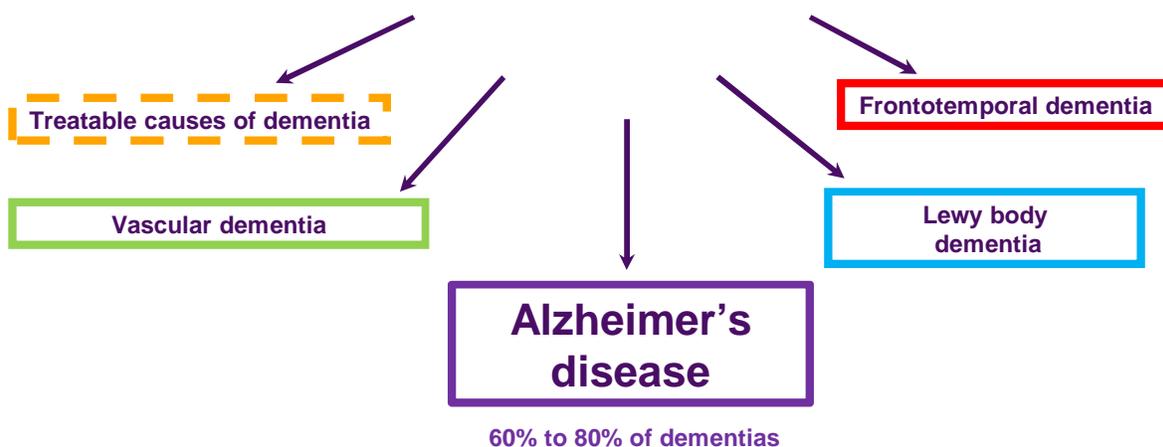
A medical syndrome that can include the following symptoms :

- Memory loss disrupts daily life
- Challenges in planning, solving problems
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks
- Confusion with time or place
- Trouble with visual or spatial perception
- New problems with words in speaking or writing
- Misplacing things or losing ability to retrace steps
- Decreased or poor judgement
- Withdrawal from work or social activities
- Changes in mood or personality



alzheimer's  association®

Dementia



alzheimer's  association®

Treatable Causes

- Medication interactions
- Dehydration
- Malnutrition
- Vitamin deficiencies
- Infection
- Delirium

Vascular Dementia

- Caused by blockage of oxygen / blood to the brain
- Stroke or TIA's
- Recent (short term) memory loss
- Laughing / crying inappropriately
- Difficulty following instructions
- Impaired judgement, reasoning
- Difficulty with problem solving
- Wandering, getting lost

alzheimer's  association®

Frontotemporal Dementia

- 60% of cases age 45-64
- Distractibility, difficulty with focus
- Impaired judgement, reasoning, insight
- Impaired problem solving
- Frequent abrupt mood changes
- Personality changes
- Impulsive behavior and actions
- Socially inappropriate reactions
- May deny wrong-doing and / or need for help

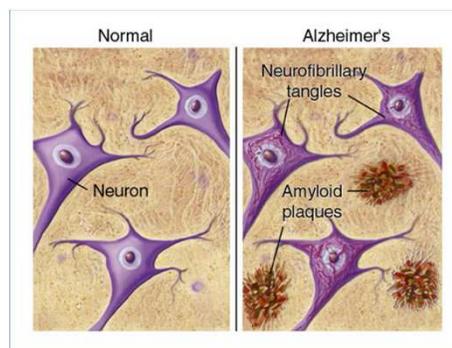
Lewy Body Dementia

- Abnormal structures multiply in brain
- Dramatic shifts in alertness
- Loss of consciousness
- Increased confusion
- Muscle rigidity
- Difficulty with control of movement
- High fall risk – (back of head)
- Vivid visual & auditory hallucinations

alzheimer's  association®

Alzheimer's Disease & The Brain

- Alzheimer's is a progressive, fatal disease
- Effects 1 in 9 Americans over age 65, and 1 in 3 adults over age 85
- Can occur at younger ages: 40's, 50's, 60's (Younger-Onset Alzheimer's Disease)
- About 50% of people with Alzheimer's or other dementias are never diagnosed.
- There are 100+ billion nerves in the brain
- Alzheimer's Disease causes plaques and tangles which will cause nerves to either re-route or atrophy



alzheimer's  association®

Risk Factors for Alzheimer's Disease

- The biggest known risk factor is age
- Family history: Having parents or siblings with the disease increases a person's individual risk
- Known genetic factors account for less than 5% of diagnoses
- Women have a higher lifetime risk than men
- African-Americans and Latinos are at greater risk than Caucasians
- Risk factors we can control or do something about:
 - Prevent serious head injury
 - Treat heart disease, stroke, diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure

alzheimer's  association®

Thinking About Safety & Dementia

- **Mild or Early Stage**
 - Diminished insight about changing cognition, reasoning, judgement
 - Diminished way-finding, problem-solving skills
 - Challenges performing familiar tasks
- **Moderate**
 - Increased risk of wandering
 - May experience hallucinations or delusions
 - Increased confusion and disorientation
 - Need help or supervision with day-to-day activities
- **Late or Severe**
 - Increased assist with ADL care
 - Difficulty with balance, walking and transfers (increased fall risk)
 - Changes in eating ability (increased choking, aspiration risk)

alzheimer's  association®

Understanding Communication



alzheimer's  association®

The Amygdala

- Emotion plays an important role in functioning, communication and behavior
- The Amygdala is a center in the brain for emotion and continues to function as other abilities become compromised over time
- As the disease progresses, emotion increasingly drives behavior

How does Alzheimer's affect a person's communication?

- **Receptive Challenges**
 - Difficulty understanding or following directions
 - Difficulty with reading comprehension
 - Difficulty following conversations
- **Expressive Challenges**
 - Word finding difficulty
 - Inventing new words
 - Difficulty organizing words logically
 - Over time, may revert to speaking in native language
 - Speak less often or rely on gestures

When initiating interaction

- Approach from the front – NOT from behind
- Identify yourself
- Use the person's name if known
- Make eye contact
- If possible, be at eye level
- Relaxed body language

alzheimer's  association®

Steps to Improve Verbal Communication

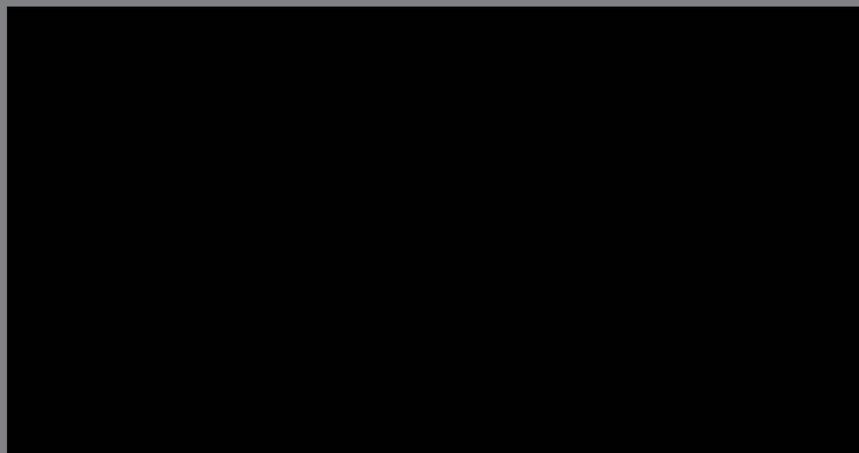
- Use short, simple words and sentences
- Give one-step directions
- Patiently wait for a response
- Repeat information or questions using same wording
- Make statements rather than ask questions
- Write things down
- Look for the emotions behind the words
- Join in the person's reality

alzheimer's  association®

Steps to Improve Non-verbal Communication

- Avoid sudden movement
- Maintain eye contact
- Be open and relaxed with your physical stance
- Remain calm and confident to provide reassurance
- Give visual cues, use props if necessary
- Encourage unspoken communication: “show me”

Make a Connection



Understanding Behavior



alzheimer's  association®

Understanding Difficult Behavior

- Behavior is not random
- Behavior is a form of communication
- Due to disease related brain changes, those with dementia have heightened sensitivity to crisis situations
- Urgent situations exacerbate symptoms of dementia
- Often confused for being drugged or intoxicated

alzheimer's  association®

Internal Triggers for Behavior Challenges

Physical health

- Pain, hunger, infection, fatigue
- Medication interaction, sleep deprivation

Emotional health

- Mood changes, frustration
- emotional dysregulation
- amygdala

Cognitive changes

- Confusion
- Hallucination / delusion
- Misperception of environment, sensory overload

External Triggers for Behavior Challenges

Environmental Factors

- New location, lack of structure / cues
- Weather, urgent scenarios
- Overstimulation, noise, distractions

The Task

- Too fast
- Too many steps
- Unfamiliar

Your approach

- Communication style
- Prior beliefs, stereotypes



Dementia - Behavior- Safety

Executive Functions

Allows us to:

- initiate and complete tasks
- anticipate outcomes and change behavior as needed
- form concepts and think abstractly
- use strategies that can help us to remember information
- Behave in socially appropriate ways

Have good judgment, insight and awareness

Denial? Personality? Normal aging?

- Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia cause damage to the frontal lobe of the brain
- Causes inability to recognize diagnosis and understand limitations
- Leads to safety concerns

alzheimer's  association®

Triggers for Resistance, Anger, Aggression

A person feels rushed, hurried or pushed

- Take time – Guide them instead of pulling or pushing
- Provide an active role to play “Come with me. I need your help.”

A person doesn't understand or recognize what is happening

- “Connect” with person first through general conversation, then begin targeted conversation, activity or task

If aggression appears to be escalating:

- Having another person reinitiate interaction may defuse the situation
- When possible, avoid physical restraints, which may cause injury and will unnecessarily escalate the situation

alzheimer's  association®

Helpful Hints

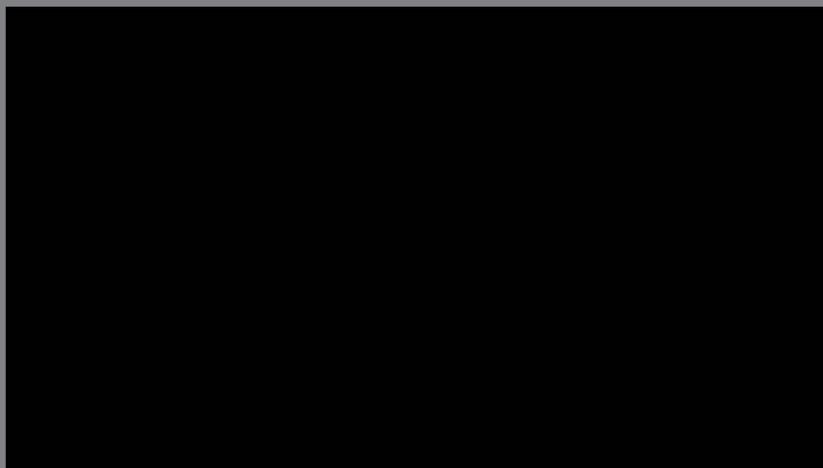
DO'S

- Remain calm, offer comfort & reassurance
- If possible, eliminate distractions in the environment
- Join in the person's reality, begin where they are: "I'm going to work." "Where do you work?"
- Pay attention to their emotions and non-verbal communication
- Consider "stretching the truth" if it may engage, comfort or help them:
"You work as a machinist? My father was a machinist. What did you make?"

DON'TS

- Don't try to reason/ explain that they have memory problems or dementia
- Don't take their accusations personally
- Don't argue or correct them
- Avoid the word "no" unless an emergency

Therapeutic Fiblet



Dementia and Urgent Situations



alzheimer's  association®

Dementia & Urgent Situations

- Heightened sensitivity to trauma
- Limited ability to understand directions
- May forget instructions
- Easily agitated, overwhelmed
- Prone to wander or hide

An impaired citizen may:

- Look confused
- Not make eye contact
- Need reminders/cues
- Deny they need help
- Repeat statements or questions
- May not be able to accurately express pain

alzheimer's  association®

Response Considerations:

Overstimulation increases dementia related symptoms

What you might find:

- Confusion
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Agitation
- Restiveness
- Suspicious thinking
- Repetitive speech or behavior

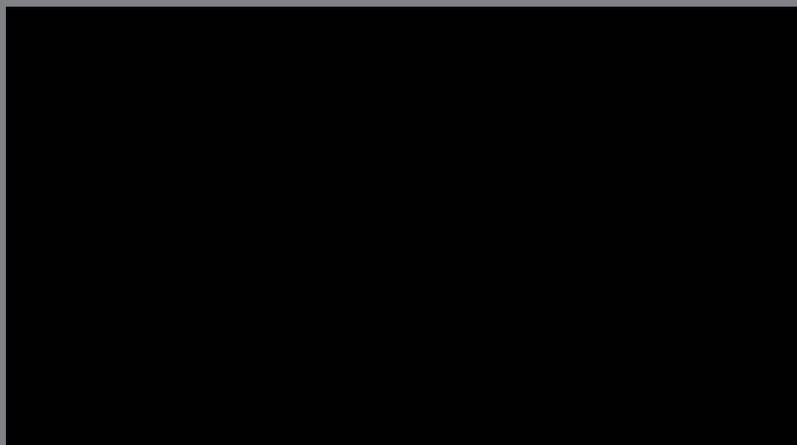
What you can do:

- Approach with a calm, warm demeanor
- Use suggested communication techniques
- Look for the feelings behind the words or behavior
- Connect and redirect

Keep in mind:

- Due to disease related brain changes, the perception of and ability to communicate pain is greatly impacted
- Cognitive changes will diminish the ability to be a reliable reporter of information
- Insight, judgement and awareness are affected, even in early stages

Shelter Scene



alzheimer's  association®

Intervention strategies

- Lead with reassurance, comfort
- Take time to connect (redirect if needed)
- Therapeutic Fiblet
- Join in their reality, do not correct or argue
- Provide a task to engage in
- Patience, smile, kindness
- Remember that your approach will guide the interaction

alzheimer's  association®

MedicAlert / SafeReturn

- 24-hour nationwide registry response service
- For person with dementia & caregiver
- Registers important info and picture
- ID bracelet or pendant available
- Offers support and guidance for caregiver
- Initial fee/annual renewal, local scholarships available



alzheimer's  association®

NH Resources

- ServiceLink (<https://www.servicelink.nh.gov/>)
- NH Association of Senior Centers (www.nhasc.org)
- Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services
(<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcbcs/beas/>)
- Veterans Administration (www.va.gov)
- Granite State Independent Living (www.gsil.org)
- Easter Seals (<http://www.easterseals.com/nh/>)
- NH Legal Assistance (www.nhla.org)

alzheimer's  association®

Alzheimer's Association Support



alz.org

- Alzheimer's Navigator
- Community Resource Finder
- ALZConnected
- Alzheimer's and Dementia Caregiver Center
- Safety Center



alz.org/findus

- Support groups, education programs and more available in communities nationwide



training.alz.org

- Free online education programs available at training.alz.org



800.272.3900

- 24/7 Helpline – Available all day every day

alzheimer's  association®

We can help

Questions?

Alzheimer's Association

We're here. All day, every day.

24/7 Helpline: 800.272.3900

alz.org®

alzheimer's  association®