



Hiya guys, as a person with Dementia (since 2007) I have been asked to explain what people might come across when they meet someone with dementia. Here are some examples:-

1. Money handling

People with dementia may have trouble understanding their money. They may appear to struggle to understand the amount they have to pay and the amount they have to give you. This applies in shops, banks and post offices etc. A little patience and understanding will help enormously.

2. Confusion and Staring

Dementia sometimes causes a 'catatonic trance'; it may look like 'daydreaming'. 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 reassurance and an offer of help will be valued.

3. Spatial Awareness

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 where they are putting their next step is common, you can often see the look of confusion in their eyes. In cases of non-Dementia, they usually look confident but still can't get to grips with doing the smallest things, this could mean there are other non-Dementia causes involved.

a guide to Understanding Dementia

4. Speech

Someone with Dementia tends to repeat themselves and may ask you the same thing, sometimes over and over again. A little patience and a helping hand to take them to what they are looking for will be valued; if they can see what they want, usually that will do the trick. Stammering and stuttering are not always just signs of a speech impediment it can also be symptomatic of dementia as I know from personal experience. Sometimes people with this illness will try and say something but 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. People with dementia doing this will look very frustrated and sometimes even angry. People who have lived with a speech disorder for some time don't usually react like this.

5. 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 shopping baskets/trolleys, or where shops are concerned, they may buy the same thing over and over again. This does not only include food retail but also places like Post Offices and banks. I have personally known cases where people who are known to a butcher have bought impractically large amounts of meat when it is clearly unlikely that they need so much and have never been asked the question 'why?'. A risk of them doing this can be that perishable foods are not consumed within the safe life of the product.

6. Checkouts

In larger retail outlets, checkout staff scanning items and need to be aware that if a person is having trouble keeping up with the conveyor speed, to slow down the process to a more manageable pace. Sometimes the speed items reach the packing area is enough to confuse an able bodied person, let alone someone with dementia. This happened to me in a busy supermarket, but once I brought it to the attention of the manager, they put some training into place to look out now for anybody struggling with the speed of the tills.



7. Talking about Dementia

Some people with dementia don't care who knows (eg. me!) and others feel quite ashamed of having it or are in complete denial. It's your approach that matter is important here. Don't ask if people are suffering with Dementia, but try to keep in mind that Dementia is a debilitating disease of the brain and that it is not always an age related disorder. Early onset Dementia has been diagnosed in people as young as early their 50s.

If someone volunteers 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. My personal experience is that Dementia can seem the 'loneliest disease in the world'

In short, the more 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.

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

Norman McNamara was diagnosed with Dementia in 2007, at the age of just 50yrs old.