

# *living* INDEPENDENT

The Newsletter of **INDEPENDENT YOU** Senior Care

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## 10 Tips for Communicating with Alzheimer's and Dementia Patients

**E**ver feel like you just weren't getting through or able to deal effectively with a person living with Alzheimer's or a related dementia? Try some of these tips to see if they help.

### **1. Make eye contact**

Always approach them face-to-face and make eye contact. Use their name if you need to. It is vital that they actually see you and that their attention is focused on you.

Read their eyes.

Always approach from the front as approaching and speaking from the side or from behind can startle them.

### **2. Be at their level**

Move your head to be at the same level as their head.

Bend your knees or sit down to reach their level. Do not stand or hover over them – it is intimidating and scary. They can't focus on you and what you are saying if they are fo-

cused on their fear.

### **3. Tell them what you are going to do before you do it**

Particularly if you are going to touch them. They need to know what is coming first so that they don't think that you are grabbing them.

### **4. Speak calmly**

Always speak in a calm manner with an upbeat tone of

voice, even if you don't feel that way. If you sound angry or agitated, they will often mirror that feeling back to you and then some.

### **5. Speak slowly**

Speak at one half of your normal speed when talking to them. Take a breath between each sentence. They cannot process words as fast as non-diseased people can. Give them a chance to catch up to your words.

### **6. Speak in short sentences**

Speak in short direct sentences with only one idea to a sentence. Usually they can only focus on only one idea at a time.

### **7. Only ask one question at a time**

Let them answer it before you ask another question. You can ask who, what, where and when, but NOT why. Why is too complicated. They will try to answer, fail and get frustrated.

### 8. Don't say "remember"

Many times they will not be able to do so, and you are just pointing out to them their shortcomings.

That is insulting, and can cause anger and/or embarrassment.

### 9. Turn negatives into positives

For example say "Let's go here" instead of "Don't go there". Be inclusive and don't talk down to them as if they were a child. Respect the fact that they are an adult, and

treat them as such.

### 10. Do not argue with them

It gets you nowhere.

Instead, validate their feelings, by saying "I see that you are angry (sad, upset, etc...). It lets them know that they are not alone and then redirect them into another thought.

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*Carole Larkin*

*Alzheimer's Reading Room May 3, 2017*



## Elderly Dehydration: Prevention & Treatment

**E**lderly dehydration is especially common for a number of reasons:

**Medications.** It's not uncommon for seniors to be on several medications at any given time. Some of these may be diuretic, while others may cause patients to sweat more.

**Decreased Thirst.** A person's sense of thirst becomes less acute as they age. In addition, frail seniors may have a harder time getting up to get a

drink when they're thirsty, or they may rely on caregivers who can't sense that they need fluids.

**Decreased Kidney Function.** As we age our bodies lose kidney function and are less able to conserve fluid (this is progressive from around the age of 50, but becomes more acute and noticeable over the age of 70).

**Illness.** Vomiting and/or diarrhea can quickly cause elderly dehydration.

### THE MYTH OF "8 GLASSES OF WATER" A DAY

"Everybody has a normal state of body water that relates to their weight. Anything below that (normal state) is dehydration; everything above it is hyperhydration," Dr. Larry Kenney,

professor of physiology and kinesiology at Penn State University, explains.

That normal level of hydration varies widely from person to person. Contrary to the mantra that everyone should drink eight glasses of water every day, Kenney says there is nothing scientific to back that up. "People misinterpreted that to be, it had to be liquid and it had to be water," he says.

A person's diet can greatly affect

hydration levels: fruits (especially watermelon), vegetables, and soups are mostly water-based. “Day in, day out, a lot of people get their water from foods, as well as behavioral attitudes towards food,” Kenney explains. “For instance, when we walk by a water fountain, we tend to take a drink, and we tend to drink when we eat.”

Kenney also takes issue with the idea of not drinking caffeinated beverages because they’re dehydrating. He says the amount of caffeine in a cup of coffee or tea is relatively small, and it’s made of mostly water anyway, so it will hydrate you to some degree. The same holds true for beer, he says, but there is a point at which the diuretic effect of caffeine and alcohol kicks in, so moderation is always the key.

In general, larger people need to drink more water, as do athletes and those who perspire heavily, but that may mean more or less than eight glasses a day. “There is no one-size-fits-all remedy,” he says.

Instead, he recommends monitoring body weight to keep track of hydration levels. To monitor body weight, one should be weighed every morning. If they’ve lost two pounds or more from the day before, and especially if they feel thirsty or have a headache, they’re probably dehydrated.

Mild dehydration is defined as losing 2 percent of your body weight. Severe dehydration occurs with 4 percent or greater body weight loss. Even mild dehydration can affect a person’s health, especially if he already has cardiac or renal problems. “We have measured in the lab cognitive impairment,” he says. “With severe dehydration, it puts a greater strain on the heart. Think of a pump trying to pump with less fluid. That would be one of the primary problems.”

### **SIGNS OF ELDERLY DEHYDRATION**

Signs of dehydration in seniors may include:

- Confusion
  - Difficulty walking
  - Dizziness or headaches
  - Dry mouth
  - Sunken eyes
  - Inability to sweat or produce tears
  - Rapid heart rate
  - Low blood pressure
  - Low urine output
  - Constipation
- If you suspect dehydration in an elderly loved one, you can check for a decrease in skin turgor by pulling up the skin on the back of the hand for a few seconds; if it does not return to normal almost immediately, the person is dehydrated.

### **PREVENTING DEHYDRATION IN SENIORS**

To help make sure your loved one doesn’t suffer from dehydration, make sure he or she consumes an adequate amount of fluids during the day; eats healthy, water-content foods such as fruit, vegetables and soups; checks that urine color is light and output adequate (dark urine or infrequency of urination is a classic sign of dehydration).

Seniors also need to be educated to drink even when they’re not thirsty. Keeping a water bottle next to the bed or their favorite chair could help, especially if they have mobility issues.

If your loved one is in a nursing home or other care facility, make sure that the staff has a hydration program in place that includes assisting residents with drinking, offering a variety of beverages, and providing drinks not only at mealtimes but in between meals. Also make sure that they monitor residents’ weight and assess them if their physical condition or mental state changes. If dehydration is an issue, and your loved one takes laxatives or diuretics, speak to his or her doctor about changing medication.

As with most illnesses, prevention is the key. Making sure your loved one stays hydrated now is much easier than treating him or her for dehydration later.



## Preserving Your Marriage While Caregiving

**C**aring for an aging parent can be stressful beyond belief. It is not uncommon for the stress and burden to take a serious toll on you and your spouse's relationship.

Here are some tips for nurturing your marriage while at the same time caring for your aging parents:

### **1. Don't procrastinate**

Sometimes when you are stressed it seems like there is never time to talk about your feelings, so you keep them bottled up inside. But when bottled up for too long, things tend to explode, so don't wait until next week when your schedule will be less hectic. If this week you have too many doctors appointments to accompany your parent to, next week the kids might get sick. Soon, "next week" never comes.

### **2. No topic is off limits**

Married couples must be able to talk about everything. Trust each other. Talk about whatever is on your mind and let your spouse do the same.

All subjects are fair game —the good, the bad and the ugly.

### **3. Listen**

Don't do all the talking. Don't interrupt. And listen, really listen to what your spouse is saying. Sometimes, it's helpful to repeat back what they say, in your own words, to make sure there is no confusion or misinterpretation.

### **4. Don't wallow in self-pity**

It is a wasted emotion. No problem has ever been solved by feeling sorry for yourself or your situation. The old saying rings true: Happiness comes from looking at the glass half full, rather than half empty. It is easy to say, but much harder to do. It takes practice and consciously thinking about what's running through your head – and talking back to that negative voice. Instead, think positive thoughts. Grab the bull by the horns and work for solutions.

### **5. Don't cast blame**

The blame game doesn't work and

it is destructive. During tough times, there is a natural tendency to blame the one you love. The truth is, there is usually no one to blame for the situation. Someone has to take care of aging parents and the job fell on you. Rather than blaming, find ways to work as a team.

### **6. Teamwork**

When you first fell in love, you felt it was the two of you against the world. You had each other's back. Support each other through thick and thin, through tough times and uncertainty. Remember the wedding vows: in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse. The same teamwork concept holds true for the rest of the family. If the kids are old enough to do chores, make sure they get done. Running a household is not easy. Making a family work is clearly difficult even in the best of times, and even more challenging when you are the caregiver for an aging parent.

### **7. Give each other space**

Everyone needs some alone time. Make time to be alone with your thoughts and refresh your spirit. If you can't take the time to leave the house for your alone time, find your own space within the home. "Man rooms" have become popular for a reason. Use the office, the den, the back porch... even the basement and turn it into your own personal retreat. You have to belong to yourself before you can belong to others.

### **8. Keep the flame alive**

Make time for fun and romance together. And make it a priority. In caregiving you share the toughest times

together. It is equally important to spend at least a small portion of your time enjoying each other's company. Carve out time to have a romantic date, go for a long walk together, drink a bottle of wine watching the sunset and/or just snuggle in bed a little longer in the morning. If your parent needs 24-hour-a-day care, bring in back-up. If friends or family can't or won't help, call an elderly respite company, even if it's just for two hours. The money spent is worth it to save your marriage.

### **9. Do the simple things**

The simple things matter in a marriage. Try to do an act of kindness or love every day. Cook your spouse's favorite dinner, acknowledge your spouse

for something he or she has done, or compliment to the other person. Yes, it takes some effort to establish the habit, but the payoff is worth the effort.

### **10. Build a network**

You and your spouse do not have to do it all yourself. Get your children involved. Solicit support from siblings, aunts and

uncles. Seek support from your neighbors. Don't be shy about asking for help. You can't do it alone.

### **11. Stay healthy**

Health and well-being are crucial when caring for an elderly parent. Exercise as often as you can, eat healthy and take your vitamins! And don't forget your annual physical exams. You can't effectively take care of others if you don't take of yourself.

RUNNING A HOUSEHOLD IS NOT EASY. MAKING A FAMILY WORK IS CLEARLY DIFFICULT EVEN IN THE BEST OF TIMES, AND EVEN MORE CHALLENGING WHEN YOU ARE THE CAREGIVER FOR AN AGING PARENT.

*By Marlo Sollitto @ agingcare.com*



## The Power of Personalized Music: “I Get to Be Me”

**W**hen Jo listens to her favorite country music—Eddy Arnold, Hank Williams, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson—she’s transported to another place.

“She closes her eyes and just rocks,” says Marie Coz, RN, a volunteer who helps Jo with her iPod. “She’ll tell me ‘I’m real deaf, crank it up!’”

The 95-year-old resident of the Memory Care unit at Mary, Queen of Angels Assisted Living Community in Nashville, Tenn., is one of those people who makes an indelible impression as soon as you meet her. The fourth child of eight, Jo grew up on a farm. “She was the best cotton picker and hoer. Her dad was real proud of her,” says Marie, who has spent many hours getting to know Jo in the process of creating her personalized playlist.

### “I Get to Be Me”

“Jo is absolutely magic. She’s this neat person, very gentle. When others are anxious, she’ll talk them down. She likes to move, put on the iPod and walk laps in the unit. I’ve never seen her with high anxiety or low depression. She can’t always give you the answer to basic questions, but a lot of her is still present.”

When Marie asks where she goes

in her mind when listening to her music, Jo responds, “Well, mostly looking for my husband,” the love of her life. And at the end of every MUSIC & MEMORY™ session, she’ll say, “Thank you so much for the music. It’s like I get to be me.”

“Music takes her to a place where she can connect with her true essence,” says Marie.

### “I’ve Got to Do This”

Experiences like her relationship with Jo continually inspire Marie to put in hundreds of volunteer hours at Mary, Queen of Angels. A former oncology nurse, she retired a few years early to care for her own 93-year-old mother. “She’s very much alive and clear, but physically needs more support to have full and stimulating days,” says Marie. “I have, for the time being, left the work force to be 100 percent available to her.” It was during this time that she first became interested in Music & Memory after watching a screening of *Alive Inside*. Deeply moved by the impact of the personalized playlist program, she decided, “in that one moment, I have to do this.”

Volunteering as a Music & Memory Ambassador, she began calling area memory care units and delivering more than 100 copies of the documentary, which she purchased herself, all over town. About two months after she had spoken with staff at Mary, Queen of Angels, Marie got a call to meet with Executive Director Lyndsey Gower. By the end of the meeting, Music & Memory was a go. Once staff and Ma-

rie completed certification training, the memory care unit launched the Music & Memory program, with Marie as lead volunteer. Gower and Activities Director Tammy Marlin have been very supportive of the program.

Now, a year in, Marie says all 18 residents of the Memory Care Unit have iPods. She manages the playlists with the help of Life Enrichment Assistant Carol Azmita and brings the music to the residents. “One day, one of my sweeties was having a meltdown,” she recalls. “I said, ‘Meg, let’s rock and roll!’ and set her up with her iPod.

She still had little tears in her eyes, but within seconds, she was singing and swaying her hips to Jerry Lee Lewis’s Great Balls of Fire. To use such a therapeutic modality is mind blowing.”

#### **“We Have Residents Dancing in the Hallways”**

Nurses in the unit are beginning to notice. “At first, they thought this is just one more thing to do,” says Marie.

“But we have residents dancing in the hallway. They are realizing there really is something to this.”

For Marie, there’s no question that Music & Memory is a powerful way to uplift the residents, tap into lost memories and build meaningful relationships. “I’m passionate about health and much prefer music over psychotropic meds,” she says. “This is just so powerful. I’m determined, in my own little way, to keep putting it out there and convincing other interested caregivers to try it.

Music is the best medicine I have ever administered.”

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*Founded in 2010, MUSIC & MEMORY™ is a non-profit organization that brings personalized music into the lives of people with cognitive or physical conditions through digital music technology, vastly improving quality of life. [www.musicandmemory.org](http://www.musicandmemory.org)  
December 5, 2016*

## Team Member Spotlight

### Meet Brittany Plummer!

**B**rittany Plummer is the Scheduling Coordinator with Independent You. She is the master of our shift calendar, keeper of the “blue” emergency cell phone, juggler of vacation requests and all around problem solver for our clients and their families. It’s quite a busy job! Of all of her job duties, Brittany most enjoys relating to the clients and caregivers, searching for the perfect “match” to meet everyone’s needs. Brittany is currently working on her BS degree in Medical

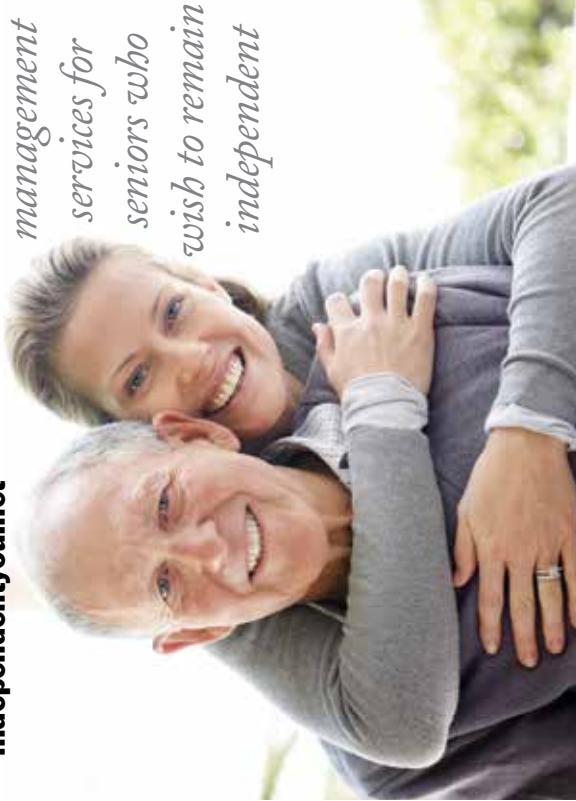


Management. She reflects that the skills she utilizes in her communications and organization is necessary to her position as the scheduling coordinator, and have enhanced her classroom. When not at work Brittany takes care of her 5 year old son, travels to see family and friends and “gives back” by volunteering at her church’s’ Feed the Homeless program. Brittany looks forward to working with the growing client base at Independent You as the aging population continues to grow. She is happy to be a part of a team that is enriching the lives of seniors!



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