

## Quick Visiting Tips from the Texas Aging Network

People with Alzheimer's Disease or any illness that causes forgetfulness and confusion like to have visitors just as much as anyone else. They don't always behave as you would expect, however. If people with dementia appear to be "different" than before, chalk it up to the disease and try not to take it personally. Dementia can cause people to say and do things that might be far out of character from what they were "before."

To effectively communicate with people who have dementia it is important to remember a few simple things:

**1. What you do is more important than what you say.** Your body language and your tone of voice are very important when talking to someone with dementia. Speak slowly and distinctly, using words that the person you are talking with can understand. If he or she doesn't seem to comprehend, choose short sentences and different words rather than repeating yourself exactly.

**2. Avoid questions whenever you can.** If you have to ask a question, try to make it a "yes" or "no" question. People with Alzheimer's Disease often have difficulty expressing complex thoughts. Don't insist on an answer if the person seems to be getting frustrated or anxious.

**3. Don't worry about the "truth."** If you can get the person talking, don't worry if the conversation makes little sense or if the person with dementia is saying things that you know are wrong or not true. Fact and fantasy often get mixed up in the brain of someone with dementia. If what the person is saying doesn't lead into dangerous behavior ("I'm going to eat this can of lye now"), try to go with the flow and avoid correcting. You'll both have more fun.

If you feel as if you are having to work too hard at the conversation, simply sitting quietly together may be more than enough. If the person you are visiting seems to be growing agitated, gently say your good-byes and leave. Sometimes a 15 to 20 minute visit is all someone with dementia can tolerate.