How Social Interaction Plays a Principal Role in Dementia

by [Guest Author](https://thecaregiverspace.org/author/guest-blogger/) | Oct 5, 2017 | [Caregiving 101](https://thecaregiverspace.org/category/caregivers-toolbox/caregiving-101/) | [5 comments](https://thecaregiverspace.org/how-social-interaction-plays-a-principal-role-in-dementia/#respond)

Dementia is an umbrella term for a progressive age-related disorder which is primarily seen in senior patients. It is associated with deterioration of the patients’ memory, cognition, behavior and a decline in their ability to perform activities of daily living. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common type of dementia that makes up nearly 70 percent of the cases.

One in ten Americans aged 65 years and older suffers from dementia. 2017 statistics reveal that an estimated 5.3 million [senior Americans are living with dementia](http://www.alz.org/facts/) related to Alzheimer’s disease.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 28 percent of seniors aged 65 years and older are living alone. Seniors with dementia are at a higher risk of social isolation, leading to serious consequences for the patient.

If you have a senior loved one who is suffering from dementia, it is crucial that you engage him/her in suitable social activities to make him/her feel loved and cared for.

Here are five ways in which social interaction can affect your senior’s health positively and boost his/her longevity and mental wellbeing.

1. Social Interaction Preserves Cognitive Function

Research has found a strong connection between loneliness and impaired cognitive function. Patients with dementia are often pessimistic about their future and tend to feel lonely owing to social isolation. This happens mainly due to retirement, the death of a spouse and/or close friends, and the lack of mobility.

Numerous studies confirm that seniors with dementia who have a [strong social network experience delayed cognitive impairment](http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2007.115923). Larger social circles have a protective influence on the comprehension and reasoning ability of seniors battling dementia. Seniors who have a considerable amount of support from their families are at a lower risk of developing memory-loss symptoms.

When seniors interact with other family members, relatives, and friends, they have to think of ways to converse and respond. Scientists believe that this basic exchange is a form of exercise that stimulates the brain cells and the formation of brain synapses, thus fueling the creation of new nerve cells.

Encourage and help your senior to build a social network by participating in voluntary and social service activities and cognitive rehabilitation programs. These activities can be a valuable source of social connection for your elder, making him/her feel valued.

2. Meeting People Comes with Psychological Benefits

Dementia is often associated with psychological conditions such as stress, depression, anxiety, and mood disorders. Researchers estimate that nearly 95 percent of seniors living with dementia suffer from behavioral and psychological symptoms such as agitation, aggression, depression, delusions, hallucinations, and sleep disturbances. These symptoms are commonly referred to as the neuropsychiatric symptoms of dementia.

Seniors with strong family and social bonds tend to have a positive outlook as they have someone reliable to talk to. Remaining socially active can significantly reduce the risk of psychological disorders and improve sleep quality.

Getting quality sleep is crucial for dementia patients to calm their psychosomatic symptoms of depression and anxiety. The National Sleep Foundation states that undisturbed sleep relaxes the brain and helps it focus and retain information better.

Plan meaningful activities for your senior, keeping in mind his/her physical abilities, leisure interests, past work life, and social preferences. Take your senior for a movie or a play, invite family and friends for a game of cards, or go through a photo album and talk about old times. These activities will improve your senior’s mood and reduce challenging behaviors.

3. Get-Together Offer Physical Health Benefits

Engaging in social interaction offers numerous physical benefits to patients with dementia. Participating in group physical activities improves the patients’ ability to perform [activities of daily living](https://bmcgeriatr.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2318-13-129) and reduces the risk of falls.

Group activities like exercising, walking, and playing games offer social interaction opportunities and can be adapted to suit a wide range of physical limitations of seniors.

Take your senior for regular walks in the park. Encourage him/her to join yoga, meditation or exercise class. Engaging in group exercises builds a strong social circle, improves mood, boosts physical strength, and reduces the risk of age-related ailments.

4. Socializing Improves the Overall Quality of Life

Dementia can significantly impact your senior’s quality of life, causing him/her to feel isolated, agitated, frustrated, depressed, and embarrassed. Your senior’s inability to perform daily tasks and remember simple things can affect his/her emotional wellbeing as well.

Patients with dementia often land up in hospitals mainly due to fractures, urinary tract or chest infections, or strokes. These patients have twice as many hospital stays every year compared to other seniors, contributing to a total annual healthcare cost of $259 billion.

According to a research paper presented at the Annual Alzheimer’s Association International Conference, [social interaction can significantly improve the quality of life](http://www.alz.org/aaic/releases_2017/AAIC17-Thurs-briefing-Lancet-Global-health-policy.asp) of patients with dementia, ease their agitation, and reduce overall healthcare costs. Support from family, friends, and relatives can go a long way in building the confidence of elderly patients.

5. Social Stimulation Promotes Independence

Seniors with dementia need assistance with personal and domestic tasks. Moreover, they often feel frustrated about and guilty of not being able to help with household activities. This increased dependence on others and feeling of being incapacitated often makes them irritable and damages their confidence levels.

Having compassionate loved ones who celebrate happy times with them and listen to their frustrations and offer solutions can be extremely comforting for seniors with dementia. This social stimulation fosters their independence as they feel connected and secure about their support system that assists them when required.

Involving your loved one in simple domestic activities like sorting out the post, organizing the laundry, arranging fresh flowers, and laying the table for a meal can make him/her feel involved and boost his/her confidence.

Seeing a loved one live with dementia can be painful. Fortunately, personal relationships and social environment can play a principal role in improving the patient’s cognitive skills and overall quality of life. Caregivers, family members, and friends can help their ailing loved one feel more valued by being around him/her during this tough period.

Conclusion:

There is mounting evidence highlighting the role social interaction plays in improving the lives of seniors with dementia. The above points will help you encourage your senior to engage in activities that will build and strengthen his/her social circle, enabling him/her to live a fulfilling life.

[(Image\_Source)](http://maxpixel.freegreatpicture.com/Alzheimers-Age-Woman-Old-Care-Costs-Dementia-63612)

**Evan Thompson**, CEO and founder of [Senior.One](http://senior.one/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) has a long standing interest in finding solutions for seniors. He helps connect senior citizens and their family members with elder care service providers and find the resources they need in one place. He offers information on nursing homes, hospice, financial planning, adult care, lifestyle and [assisted living facilities in Albuquerque](http://senior.one/). He provides information on housing, medical professionals, financial planning services, and lifestyle options.

About Guest Author

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