

Deaf and dementia: Symptoms of dementia (BSL)

Transcript in English

Clark: Dementia often starts by affecting your short-term memory but people can think that dementia is **only** forgetting things. In BSL the sign for 'dementia' means 'to forget' but what someone with dementia struggles with will depend on which part of the brain the disease has affected.

Can you tell me more about some of the symptoms that many people with dementia can experience?

Carolyn: To help us let's think about all the different functions we use in everyday activities, so these are changes that you (or your family member) might notice.

For example in making a cup of tea.

Someone with dementia might have difficulty thinking things through, planning or making decisions – understanding how to tell if the water is hot or their teacup is full. They might fill their cup to overflowing.

Or they might put objects in what seems to be a strange place – they might struggle to recognise the fridge so put the milk in the cupboard. Concentrating, understanding new ideas or solving problems can be difficult so daily tasks can become harder.

As we discussed memory can be affected, so someone with dementia might have problems with remembering more recent memories, and easily remember things from a long time ago.

Clark: How might this affect something like making a cup of tea?

Carolyn: They might forget where to find the tea bags, or sugar. They might feel lost or confused as they expected their kitchen to look like the kitchen they clearly remember using when they were in 20s or 30s – the layout, décor, appliances would all look different.

Someone with dementia might have problems judging distances even though their eyesight is fine. Their brain might find it hard to make sense of what they see. For example, a black mat on the floor for drying your feet in front of a shop might look like a hole in the ground. Patterns on a wallpaper or tablecloth might look real or appear to move. Reflection in mirrors or shiny surfaces might look like something else.

This can cause the person to feel confusion, distress and worry.

Clark: So someone with dementia can have difficulties with emotions?

Carolyn: Yes. It might be that the area of the brain that controls their emotions has been damaged by their dementia, or they may be struggling with coping with some of the other symptoms we've discussed. They might become more anxious, sad, frightened, irritable or easily upset.

As a result they might lose interest in hobbies or activities they used to enjoy, or lose confidence. Or their personality may change – for example someone who used to be shy might become very assertive.

Clark: And what about signing – do people have any problems communicating when they develop dementia?

Carolyn: Yes. If the left side of the brain which controls language is damaged, someone with dementia might have problems communicating – so they might not be able to sign if they want a drink, or if they take milk or sugar in tea. They might use the wrong sign, sign in the wrong order, retell information again and again, use old signs or revert to what they used when they were younger which might be oral method. Never force someone to use modern signs, it is important to remember and celebrate that these old signs are part of that person's past and their identity.

Also remember that movement can be affected including coordination so someone might not use the right hand shapes when signing.

So the key message to remember is that **dementia is not just about memory loss** – the brain controls lots of other functions that can be affected.

In the next film we will be discussing how to support someone experiencing some of these symptoms.