

Understanding Noise and Dementia Empowerment Tool

Hearing is typically not affected due to dementia, however, people living with dementia tend to respond to noise on a sensory level rather than intellectually. Sensitivity alterations, combined with age-related hearing deterioration, often lead to noise-induced stress reactions as opposed to using noise to support how we process what is happening around us. Combined with other sensory challenges (sight, touch, etc.), the effect can cause a dramatic change in a person's behavior who is living with dementia.

The following tips will help care partners reduce what is often called 'noise pollution.'

TIPS FOR REDUCING NOISE

Dining

- **Challenge:** Dining areas often have multiple layers of noise that can cause unrest and agitation. If a TV or radio is on while others are talking and dishes or cutlery is clattering, this can lead to a heightened sense of disorientation.
- **Solution:** Observe how much noise is taking place and reduce or remove as much as possible. Have quieter, calming background music and ask others to refrain or limit conversations. Always observe the person's reaction and adjust as needed.

Open Spaces

- **Challenge:** Be aware that noise in public areas might sound louder than in enclosed spaces due to sound reverberation. Something as simple as a med cart being wheeled down an open hallway can often sound noisier to a person living with dementia.
- **Solution:** Observe how much noise is taking place and reduce or remove as much as possible. Be mindful of where others are in terms of uncontrolled noise happening in open spaces. Gently redirect the person to a smaller, quieter place if you notice signs of agitation or distress.

Bathrooms

- Challenge: Acoustics in bathrooms can be particularly challenging. Flowing water and a flushing toilet can startle a person living with dementia or make it difficult to concentrate.
- Solution: Coach the person, letting them know when water will be turned on or off or when a toilet will be flushed to reduce alarm for the person

At Night

- Challenge: A person with dementia must have a good night's sleep and maintain a regular sleep schedule. Unfamiliar or disturbing noises at night or even noise from washing machines, TVs, or other household items may keep a person from getting and staying in a deep sleep.
- Solution: Work to keep noise to a minimum, especially for those more sensitive to noise. Shift routines or relocate tasks to areas that are further away from bedrooms.

Other Tips

- Limit the TV being on unless a person is watching it. Don't use the TV as background noise.
- Limit the use of alarms, phones, doorbells, and alarm bells
- Mealtime should be calm and relaxing. Quiet music may be acceptable but limit multiple conversations, dishes, and TV clanging.
- Reduce background noise a few minutes before engaging in conversation