



Dental Offices

Dental offices have begun to work towards better serving their clients with dementia. Dental hygiene is very important for people living with dementia, but it can be challenging to keep up. Becoming a more dementia friendly dental office can help provide a safer and more comfortable experience for **people living with dementia and their families/care partners.**



Ready to implement dementia friendly practices?

Signs of Dementia⁴

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life.
- Challenges in planning or solving problems.
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure.
- Confusion with time or place.
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.
- New problems with words in speaking or writing.
- Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps.
- Decreased or poor judgment.
- Withdrawal from work or social activities.
- Changes in mood or personality.

Dementia Friendly Communication Skills^{1,5}

- Slow pace slightly and allow time for person to process and respond.
- Use shorter simple sentences, and ask one question at a time.
- Speak clearly and calmly, be patient and understanding; listen.
- Treat the person with dignity and respect.
- Avoid arguing with or embarrassing the person.
- Be aware of your body language: smile and make eye contact at eyelevel.
- Seek to understand the person's reality or feelings.
- Apologize and redirect to another environment or subject as needed.

Dementia Friendly Dental Office Practices

Service Tips:

- Avoid approaching person with dementia from the back or side. Approach from front and identify yourself.
- Always explain each task/procedure and alert person with dementia when beginning a new step throughout the appointment.
- Avoid talking too close to face or too loudly, and use gentle touches.
- Pay close attention to facial expressions and body movements for discomfort during procedures.
- Give simple instructions for care plans

Environment Tips:

- Schedule appointments earlier and for shorter periods of time. Give extra reminder call.
- Allow care partner to sit in chair in the exam room
- Indoor environments should be safe and accessible for people living with dementia: well-lit hallways, uncluttered spaces, and prominent, easy-to-understand signs for restrooms and other important places.
- Provide quiet places to sit and relax.
- Provide family restrooms to allow for care partners to assist if necessary

Support Employee Care Partners

- Talk with employees and show that you understand they are juggling two jobs – one as a care partner, and one working for you.
- Help employees connect to community resources.
- Establish policies and practices supportive to care partners, such as work schedule flexibility, and inform employees of these policies.
- Ask for employee feedback on company's responsiveness and efforts to support elder care partner needs.

Additional Resources

1. **Business Training – Alzheimer's Friendly Business online course provided by Home Instead and the HISC Network**
<https://www.helpforalzheimersfamilies.com/interactive-course/#/>
2. **AARP, Understanding the Impact of Family Caregiving on Work**
http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/public_policy_institute/ltc/2012/understanding-impact-family-caregiving-work-AARP-ppi-ltc.pdf
3. **Alzheimer's Association, Know the 10 Signs**
<http://www.alz.org/10-signs-symptoms-alzheimers-dementia.asp>
4. **AARP – How Employers Can Support Working Caregivers**
<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/life-balance/info-2017/ways-to-support-working-caregivers-lh.html>
5. **Alzheimer's Society – Communicating**
<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/info/20064/symptoms/90/communicating-and-language>
6. **Dementia Friendly Iowa**
<https://dementiafriendlyiowa.org/>
7. **Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Dementia Friendly Employers Toolkit**
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dementia/employers.htm>
8. **Alzheimer's Association Dental Care Information**
<https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/daily-care/dental-care>
9. **Act on Alzheimer's Dental Provider Practice Tools**
https://actonalz.org/sites/default/files/images/ACT_DentalProviderPracticeTool.pdf

Dental Offices are just one important part of the community. By working in tandem with other sectors, dental offices can help make the entire community more dementia friendly. Learn more about the process and help your community and others become more dementia friendly at www.dfamerica.org.



Adapted from ACT on Alzheimer's® developed tools and resources.