

Communication and Swallowing for Patients with Dementia



Communication and swallowing difficulties can have a negative impact on a person's confidence when he/she is socialising and participating in daily activities. The Speech Therapy department provides assessment, diagnosis, and therapy services for inpatients and outpatients with speech, language, voice and swallowing disorders.

There are many causes of dementia, each affecting the brain in different ways. Each person with dementia is unique. They may experience difficulties with swallowing and/or communication that includes loss of memory, confusion, and problems with speech and understanding. These difficulties will worsen as the disease progresses.

Communicating with the person with dementia

Communication difficulties occur in all types of dementia but specific problems will vary according to the type of dementia and the stage of the disease. Communication difficulties can be upsetting and frustrating for the person with dementia and those around them. However, there are many ways to ensure you understand each other.

Communication strategies

Before the conversation:

- Attract the person's attention before speaking.
- Make sure the person can see you clearly.
- Reduce distractions, e.g. by limiting background noise.



During the conversation:

- Avoid asking too many direct questions.
- Be positive.
- Do not talk about the person with dementia as if he/she is not there or talk to him/her as you would to a young child.
- Maintain eye contact throughout the conversation.
- Speak at a slightly slower pace, allowing time in between sentences.
- Use short, specific sentences.
- Use visual references, e.g. pictures or objects.
- When the person says something incorrect, try to steer the conversation around the subject instead of contradicting them directly.

Points to note:

- Dementia is a descriptive term for a group of symptoms that can be caused by a number of disorders that affect the brain.
- Dementia is not part of normal ageing, but elderly people are more prone to it.
- Dementia results from the death of nerve cells and/or the loss of communication among these cells.
- There are many types of dementia, e.g. Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, etc.

Swallowing difficulties

Many people with dementia experience swallowing difficulties. Prolonged swallowing difficulties without intervention may lead to:

- Dehydration.
- Deterioration in quality of life.
- Malnutrition.
- Pneumonia (chest infection).

Signs of swallowing difficulties:

- Choking when eating and drinking.
- Holding/pocketing of food in the mouth.
- Refusing food (even during mealtimes).
- Spitting out food (especially food that is not to the person's liking).

Feeding strategies:

- Providing small frequent meals to ensure that the person's nutritional intake is maintained.
- Putting food right in front of the person.
- Reducing distractions during mealtimes.
- Using verbal and visual cues to ensure that the person swallows his/her food or drink.

For more information

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital and Jurong Community Hospital

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General enquiries: 6716 2000 Fax: 6716 5500

www.juronghealth.com.sg

Clinical and appointment line hours (closed on Sundays and public holidays)

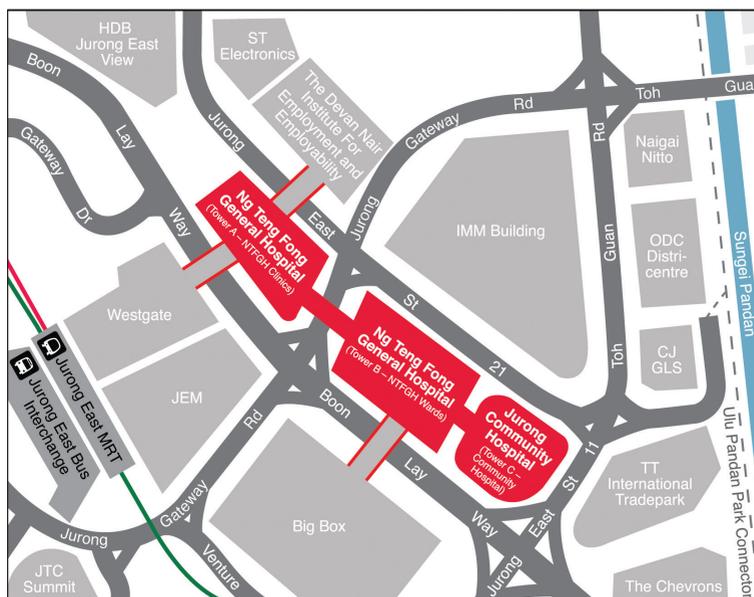
For appointments, please call 6716 2222

Monday - Friday 8.00am - 5.30pm, Saturday 8.00am - 12.30pm

For dental appointments, please call 6716 2233

Monday - Thursday 8.00am - 5.30pm, Friday 8.00am - 5.00pm

Getting there



By train

Jurong East MRT Station

By bus

From Jurong East Bus Interchange

SBS 51, 52, 66, 78, 79, 97, 97e, 98, 98M, 105, 143, 143M,

160, 183, 197, 333, 334, 335, 506

Along Boon Lay Way

SBS 99, Private bus service 625

Disclaimer:

The information in this brochure is meant for educational purposes and should not be used as substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek your doctor's advice before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition.