



Repetition

Why does it happen?

Always Consider First:

The person may have an unmet need that they are trying to communicate to you

How the Person's Health Could Contribute to Repetition:

- Physical changes in the person's brain could result in the parts of their brain that help them to remember facts, answers to questions, or activities they've just completed deteriorating or no longer functioning, otherwise known as short-term memory loss
- Repetition can be a way a person with dementia who is struggling to remember something tries to remember it – repetition may be a style of learning that the person practiced at school.
- The person's communication skills may have diminished due to their dementia, leaving them with a smaller vocabulary leading to the person repeating words that may not be the word(s) they want to use but the only word(s) they can recall in that moment.
- The person may have an undiagnosed health condition (physical or mental) that is causing them to express themselves in this way . For example, sudden and acute repetition (with confusion) may be attributable to an infection.
- The person may not be able to explain that they are experiencing the side-effect(s) of medicine(s).
- The person may have undiagnosed pain that they are trying to alert you to.

How the Person's Feelings and Emotions Could Contribute to Repetition

- Repetition may be a sign of insecurity, if the person feels the need to repeatedly hear something comforting or familiar.
- Repetition may become a habit that the person has or develops because it is something that is familiar and achievable for the person, and something they can control. In this context it may be rhythmical repetition.
- The person may be feeling confused, anxious, frightened or bored, and repeating words, phrases or sounds that may directly, or indirectly, point to these feelings.
- The combination of the person's learning disability and their dementia may be causing them additional stress, anxiety or uncontrollable emotions that they can only express through repetition.



How the Person's Daily Life Could Contribute to Repetition

- The person's environment, even if it was previously familiar to them, may now feel hostile due to the person's dementia – For example, the person is using repetition to block out other sounds in their environment. The person may also be disorientated, and may then continually repeat a phrase like, “I don't know where I am” or a question like, “Where am I?”
- The company of a particular person or persons, even someone they were once happy to share their time and space with, may now make the person feel uncomfortable, leading to the person repeating instructions for this person to go away, or leave them alone.
- The person may no longer be familiar with their routine. For example, they may be confused about what is happening when, and continually ask for reassurance about factual information, particularly if they have a routine that involves lots of different activities.



Ways to Support the Person

Staff Approach

- Be patient and treat every time you answer as the first time you have answered. Don't argue with the person, or tell them that you've already answered their question.
- Be consistent in answering. Do not be tempted to vary your answers in the hope the person might give up asking you the question, this approach will only add to the person's confusion.
- Be kind and positive in your responses - smile and consider each opportunity to respond as potentially the beginning of a great interaction. If you can make a positive connection, you may be able to move the conversation away from the topic generating repetition and onto something else that is relevant and meaningful.

Ways to Support the Person

Staff Approach Continued...

- If the person is rhythmically repeating certain words, phrases or noises, the person may find comfort and familiarity if you join in with them, taking their pace and volume level. This should never be done in a mocking way, but very much in a way that validates the person and their need in that moment.
- Do not ignore the person, or allow yourself to become irritated, frustrated or short-tempered with the person. Remove yourself from the situation, if necessary and without endangering the person, if you feel unable to remain calm and control your response.

Think about Unmet Needs

- Consider if there is anything significant in what the person is repeating - For example, it is a word that might indicate an unmet need the person has, or something that they are trying to communicate to you to indicate how they are feeling physically or emotionally? Remember that the word/phrase or sound may not be obviously indicating what the person needs - For example, the person may need the toilet, but rather than communicating this in their 'usual' way they are communicating it through repetition of another word or sound.
- How comfortable is the person? For example, are they happy in their clothing and with their personal appearance, not hungry, thirsty, in need of their medicines, tired, constipated or otherwise unwell?
- If the person is less mobile, be mindful that if the person has been sitting for too long they may have become uncomfortable, frustrated, bored or distressed because they need the toilet or feel they need to be somewhere.
- Does the person have free access to occupation and activity – For example, is the person being supported to engage in their hobbies and interests when they want to, or access new meaningful activities that engage them physically and/or mentally to prevent boredom? This can be helpful in taking the person's mind off of the subject of their repetition.
- Equally, does the person have access to relaxation and, if they want to, the opportunity to access the outside world and nature, which may be a calming experience for them?

Think about Unmet Needs

Think about Unmet Needs Continued...

- Review how well you are supporting the person with their choice and control – do they have every opportunity they could have to exercise their choice and control, or are they feeling like they are having to try and get their voice heard, potentially by repeating themselves?
- Think about the emotional support that the person has, or might need - is there something missing that could lead the person to feel insecure?
- If the person appears to be looking for comfort, consider giving them items of comfort to them, or talking about comforting aspects of their life with them. Just spending time with you may be an important source of reassurance and security for the person



Understanding the Person's Health Needs

- Rule out any undiagnosed physical or mental health conditions or undiagnosed pain.
- Ensure that the person's eyesight and hearing is checked regularly – poor eyesight could mean the person can't see something and therefore keeps asking for information that they should be seeing, and poor hearing could mean the person can't hear your response(s).
- Review medicines regularly.
- Review the Treatments module in the Wellbeing for Life toolkit for ideas of non-pharmacological interventions that may help to support the person.

Changing Daily Life

- Consider if the person's environment is causing the person to repeat themselves - this may be particularly evident if the person's repetition appears to be louder than normal (because the environment is noisy), or with a more angry tone (because everyone is so busy and the person feels like they are being ignored).
- If repetition is because of the need for factual information (IE: wanting to know the day/time), consider enhancing the person's environment with technology that will provide the answer the person is looking for (like a dementia clock for example). Also think about daily activity boards that visually show what is happening on each day and when it's happening, and dementia friendly signage to help the person orientate themselves independently.
- Consider if the person's routine is still meeting their needs, or whether it needs to be simplified in a way that makes sense to them?

Finding Patterns and Problem Solving

- Understand the person and their history – by researching their life story, you may find clues to explain and/or alleviate their repetition. For example, the person may be repeating a word or phrase that relates to something in their past.
- Think about every aspect of the person's communication, not just their repetition - there may be hints as to any unmet needs the person has from their body language or gestures.





Produced by the MacIntyre Dementia Project with the support of an Innovation, Excellence and Strategic Development Fund Award from the Department of Health.

A special thank you to Beth Britton, and for all her hard work on the MacIntyre Dementia Project.

<https://www.bethbritton.com/>

© MacIntyre 2017. All rights reserved
602 South Seventh Street
Central Milton Keynes
MK9 2JA
www.macintyrecharity.org