

Can sequencing be affected for a person with dementia?

By Debbie Selsavage, CDP

The definition of sequencing means: "*Doing Things in the Correct Order*".

As the damage spreads to the frontal lobes, someone with Alzheimer's and forms of dementia may struggle with decision-making, planning or organizing, such as family finances, dressing, brushing teeth, showering, shaving. A more complex task with a sequence of steps, such as following a new recipe, cleaning, and using the correct products for the task, might also become much harder.

You may see them skip steps, doing actions in the wrong order, making everyday activities challenging and potentially frustrating for them; for example, they might put on their shoes before their socks, or start brushing their teeth before they put the toothpaste on the brush, multiple-step activities can become more difficult and requiring more support from the care partners. They have poor-decision making skills and they could put on shorts in the winter, go without a jacket. They may have an issue visual perception of where things are to do the task, or even what is the right tool to use for the task.

Why does this happen?

- Brain damage: Dementia affects the areas of the brain responsible for planning, organizing, and sequencing actions, making it difficult to carry out tasks in a logical order.

Key signs of sequencing difficulties in dementia:

- Dressing challenges:

Putting on clothes in the wrong order, like pants before shirts, or not being able to button clothes correctly.

- Meal preparation errors:

Mixing up steps like adding ingredients in the wrong sequence or forgetting to turn on the stove.

- Difficulty with hygiene routines:

Forgetting to brush teeth properly or skipping steps like rinsing their mouth.

- Confusion with multi-step instructions:

Struggling to follow directions that involve several steps, like taking medication at specific times.

- Repeating actions:

Starting a task over again, even if they have already begun.

- Disorientation with time:

Not being able to follow a daily schedule or understand the order of events throughout the day.

What can be done to help?

- Simple instructions:

Break down tasks into smaller, easy-to-follow steps, providing visual cues like pictures or written lists.

- Routines and structure:

Establish consistent daily routines with familiar activities and predictable schedules.

- Adaptive aids:

Use tools like labeled containers or clothing with easy-to-fasten closures to simplify tasks.

- Caregiver support:

Be patient, provide gentle reminders, and offer assistance when needed, explaining each step clearly.