

# Dementia care improved by just one hour of social interaction each week

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Increasing the amount of social interaction for people with dementia living in care homes to just one hour a week improves quality of life when combined with personalised care.

A large-scale trial led by the University of Exeter, King's College London and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust found that the approach also saves money.

Previous research has found that in many care homes, residents have as little as two minutes of [social interaction](#) per day.

The new research, funded by the National Institute of Health Research and published today in the journal *PLOS Medicine*, upskilled key care [home](#) staff to deliver person-centred care. That involves simple measures such as talking to residents about their interests and involving them in decisions around their own care.

When combined with just one hour a week of social interaction, the programme improved quality of life and reduced agitation and aggression in

[people](#) with dementia.

Professor Clive Ballard, of the University of Exeter Medical School, who led the research, said: "While many care homes are excellent, standards still vary hugely. We have previously found that the average amount of social interaction for people with dementia was just two minutes a day. It's hardly surprising when that has a knock-on effect on quality of life and agitation.

"Our approach improves care and saves money. We must roll out approaches that work to do justice to some of the most vulnerable people in society. Incredibly, of 170 carer training manuals available on the market, only four are based on evidence that they really work. That is simply not good enough - it has to change."

The trial involved more than 800 people with dementia across 69 care homes in South London, North London and Buckinghamshire. Two 'care staff champions' at each home were trained over four day-long sessions, to take simple measures that such as involve talking to residents about their interests and decisions around their own care. Importantly, the approach also saved money compared to standard care. Researchers say the next key challenge is to roll the programme to the 28,000 care homes in the UK to benefit the lives of the 300,000 people with dementia living in these facilities.

Dr Jane Fossey from the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, said: "Taking a person-centred approach is about getting to know each resident as an individual - their interests and preferences - and reflecting these in all aspects of care. It can improve the lives of the person themselves and it can be rewarding for carers too. We've shown that this approach significantly reduces agitation and saves money. Rolling out the training nationwide could benefit many other people."

The results are the findings of the Improving Wellbeing and Health for People with Dementia (WHELD) trial, the largest non-pharmacological randomised control trial in people with dementia living in care homes to date.

Dr Doug Brown, Director of Research at Alzheimer's Society, said: "70% of people living in care homes have dementia, so it is vital that staff have the right training to provide good quality dementia care.

"A person-centred approach takes into account each individual's unique qualities, abilities, interests, preferences and needs. This study shows that training to provide this type of individualised care, activities and social interactions can have a significant impact of the well-being of people living with dementia in care homes. It also shows that this kind of effective care can reduce costs, which the stretched social care system desperately needs.

"Alzheimer's Society is committed to improving dementia care through research. That means getting interventions like this put into practice, and funding further research to improve the quality of life for people with [dementia](#) in their own homes, [care homes](#) and hospitals."

**More information:** Clive Ballard et al. Impact of person-centred care training and person-centred activities on quality of life, agitation, and antipsychotic use in people with dementia living in nursing homes: A cluster-randomised controlled trial, *PLOS Medicine* (2018). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1002500 , [journals.plos.org/plosmedicine ... journal.pmed.1002500](https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article/doi/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002500)

Provided by University of Exeter

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