

Cognitive Stimulation Therapy



What is Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST)?

Cognitive stimulation therapy (CST) is a non-pharmacological intervention designed for people with dementia which focuses on improving and strengthening cognitive resources, supporting retention of ability to carry out day to day activities, and maintaining social and interaction skills.

CST was developed by Dr Aimee Spector, a psychologist in the University College London, and her colleagues, based on research they had done into therapeutic activities with people with dementia.

CST is Evidence-Based

15 trials with a total of 718 participants indicated that CST has a beneficial effect on the memory and thinking test scores of people living with dementia. Participants also reported improved quality of life.

A blind trial with 201 participants from 18 residential homes and five day centres found that CST produces improvements in cognition and quality of life which compare favourably with trials of cholinesterase inhibitors.

The cost-effectiveness of the CST programme was evaluated by Knapp et al who concluded that CST is relatively inexpensive and offers strong value for money.

What's Involved?

CST involves 14 sessions of structured 45 minute group therapy sessions. Sessions ideally run twice a week over 7 weeks and each one covers a different theme.

Members give their group a name and sessions cover a range of activities to stimulate thinking, memory and connection through:

- discussing current news stories
- listening to music or singing
- playing word, number and category games
- doing practical activities such as baking

Consistency between sessions is created through using the same warm-up activity, a Reality Orientation (RO) board containing information about the group, and having a 'theme song'.

CST is fun, relaxed, interactive, and encourages members to learn, work together, express opinions and build self-esteem

- References: www.cochrane.org, www.england.nhs.uk, Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine 2011; 28 (3)