



Playlist  
for Life

# Smart speakers



Guidance created by and for  
people living with dementia



**Music Labs**  
from Playlist for Life

A **smart speaker** is a speaker connected to the internet that is controlled by your voice. It allows you to listen to your playlist simply by asking for it.

These devices can help people who struggle to use a physical device to access music. However, voice activated technology is still a relatively new concept and may not suit everyone living with dementia.

Playlist for Life worked with 5 people living with dementia and 2 family carers to test Alexa enabled Amazon Echo Dots. We wanted to explore how these devices could help them and others living with dementia.

All participants said that using the devices helped them listen to their music more regularly. Four out of five said that it made listening to their music easier. All participants said they would recommend the device to other people living with dementia. However, there were a range of challenges from setting up the devices to communicating with them.

Find out more about their experience in this guide.

You can read the full project report [here](#).





# Carol

## Living with dementia

### What did you like about the device?

The speed of finding the music you selected.

### What did you think of the voice activated technology?

It's so simple I could even add music to my playlist. I didn't think I would like it because I'm a touchy-feely person and I like my CDs but I find I'm playing more music with the Alexa than getting up to put a CD on.

### What were the cons of the device?

Sometimes it did not understand me and I kept forgetting you had to say "Alexa" before a command.

### What are your tips for someone else using an Alexa device?

- Speak slowly and clearly when talking to the machine
- Remember to say "Alexa" first
- If you make lots of playlists keep a book with their names so you can remember what to ask for



# John

## Living with dementia

### What did you like about the device?

I sing in a male voice choir and we aren't allowed to use [sheet] music, so before a concert I just ask Alexa to play the songs that we are singing and it brings the lines back to me and the words that I've forgotten.

### What did you think of the voice activated technology?

So fast at finding the music you requested, you can request a piece of music that comes to mind at a particular moment.

### What were the cons of the device?

When I asked it to play 'John's playlist' it kept playing Elton John, I had to ask for 'my playlist' to access my personal music.

### What are your tips for someone else using an Alexa device?

Just try it! It's just a wonderful piece of equipment. Use it for what type of music you like. You can just ask her to play relaxing music and she does. It's a wonderful thing. If you can't remember the name of a song you can ask her to play the song using some of the lyrics you can remember.

# Maureen

## Caring for her uncle

### What did you like about the device?

John enjoyed the playlist and enjoyed the memories it provoked.

### What did you think of the voice activated technology?

To be honest John probably preferred listening to his radio but was fascinated that Alexa could answer questions when she understood his requests but often someone else had to do it for him.

### What were the cons of the device?

Quite often it didn't understand what John was saying and he found that rather frustrating.

### What are your tips for someone else using an Alexa device?

If she couldn't understand what he was saying he did get a little bit cross. So, I told him to try and be as clear and precise as he could. Making sure he had his dentures in helped as well.



# James

## Living with dementia

### What did you like about the device?

I think Alexa is marvellous. She communicates with you at all times, day and night, such as wishing you a good morning, or telling you to sleep tight. It is a different way of listening to music, and much easier too. I also found it good for my brain, as I tried to recall the names of songs, and the artists. It also brought back delightful memories, from bygone years. Some I would not normally have remembered.

### What did you think of the voice activated technology?

I can speak to 'her' at any time during the day, just to hear a 'human' voice. I can ask the time, the day and date, the weather, or to play certain songs, without rising, going to the computer and starting it up.

### What were the cons of the device?

I would suggest a person with dementia, who has not been brought up with a computer, would struggle to set it up alone. She is amazing but several times I felt annoyed with her. I noticed Alexa sometimes cannot find what you want and gives you an alternative. I am unsure if this is helpful or annoying, her choosing not obeying. I would never fully trust the device.

### What are your tips for someone else using an Alexa device?

Once you say "Alexa" do not wait too long to speak, otherwise she turns off. I sometimes said the song title, then hesitated to remember the artist. You might have to write both down on a scrap of paper, to remind yourself, and to avoid delay.

# George

## Caring for his father

### What did you like about the device?

[My Dad] has issues with the feelings in his fingers so a voice activation was good.

### What did you think of the voice activated technology?

The Alexa wouldn't always work with the voice activated technology. We struggled to get it to play my Dad's playlist. We could ask for similar music and it would play that.

### What were the cons of the device?

The fact that we couldn't get it to play my Dad's personalised playlist through voice activation. When we asked for 'George's playlist' it would play George Michael or George Ezra.

### What are your tips for someone else using an Alexa device?

If the device won't recognise your playlist, call it something very unique to help make it easier for the device to find.

# Find out more about Music Labs

The Music Labs project, funded by RS Macdonald, is our way of involving people living with dementia and those who care for them in shaping the future of our services and resources.

We bring people together to tell us more about the issues and barriers they face when using personal music. We then work together on developing ways to solve these issues.

Music Labs take place in the community: in people's own homes, over the phone and via the internet. Opportunities can include:

- User Testing of equipment
- Taking part in surveys and discussions groups
- Developing peer to peer resources

Music Labs are about listening to you, the real experts, and giving you a chance to share your experience to help others living with dementia discover the power of music!

Find out more:

**[www.playlistforlife.org.uk/  
musiclabs](http://www.playlistforlife.org.uk/musiclabs)**



**[playlistforlife.org.uk](http://playlistforlife.org.uk)**

Playlist for Life is a charity that operates UK-wide and is registered as a SCIO at Suite 419, The Pentagon Centre, 36 Washington Street, Glasgow G3 8AZ.  
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