

Adult Day Caregiver Connection



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Managing Behaviors of Dementia

Caring for someone with dementia or Alzheimer's can be challenging. The disease's progressive nature and limited treatment options make caregiving a stressful and time-consuming undertaking.

There are many common behavioral and personality changes that occur in the different stages of dementia. Individuals with dementia often act in ways that are different from their "old self," and these changes can be challenging to adjust to. Some of these changes include: wandering, aggression, agitation, sundowning, and rummaging.

Wandering

It's common for a person living with dementia to wander or become lost or confused about their location, and it can happen at any stage of the disease. Although common, wandering can be dangerous and the stress of this risk weighs heavily on caregivers.

Distraction/diversion

- Play Music
- Try Aromatherapy
- Encourage Chores
- Start a new Activity
- Use reassurance

Redirection

- Validate their reason
- Join in their Reality
- Redirect their attention

To mitigate unsafe wandering, you can provide safe areas for your loved ones to pace, but keep a careful eye out for fatigue. If your loved one starts to wander to areas outside the home, Inform neighbors about wandering tendencies and make sure they have contact phone numbers and/or have your loved one wear a bracelet with your contact information.

Aggression

Agitation, restlessness, and anxiety are common in people with dementia, but even more worrisome is aggression. Aggression is commonly seen with those in one of the midstages of dementia. These behaviors can begin abruptly or build from an individual's frustration. The

key to managing aggression is to look for the source so you can understand the feelings that lead to the actions.

After checking for physical discomforts, ask yourself: *What triggered this behavior?* Spending time to figure this out may help prevent future incidents. Use a soft, soothing tone and reassurance.

The individual might be feeling unheard, misunderstood, threatened, frightened, or embarrassed and frustrated that they need help to do things they used to do independently.

Here are Some things you can do to help:

- Have a planned response system
- Respond, distract, redirect
- Move and speak slowly- remind them of who you are
- Avoid restraint if possible
- Avoid frequent changes, crowds, or loud noises
- Avoid overwhelming situations
- Remove them from stressful situation

You can also try a change of environment—something surprising or distracting such as dancing, singing, going for a walk, a ride in the car, or simply going to another room. Involve the individual in an activity or ask for his or her help with a task. *However, keep in mind that reasoning often doesn't work.*

Rummaging

People with dementia may be driven to search or rummage for something that they believe is missing. For example, individuals may hoard items out of fear that they may “need” the items some day. They may begin to hide items when they are not able to recognize the people around them anymore.

Here are Some things you can do to help:

- Use labels and place their name on belongings
- Incorporate “straightening up” as an activity
- Set aside an area or box to rummage through

Sundowning

Sundowning is a term that refers to increased confusion and disorientation in the late afternoon and early evening. It usually occurs between 3:00 - 11:00 pm. This behavior is usually most severe during the middle stages of Alzheimer's disease, decreasing with disease progression.

Ways to reduce the severity of sundowning:

- Encourage rest periods throughout the day
- Involve a quiet activity
- Provide security and protection
- Simplify the environment
- Encourage fluids

Every individual is different, but some of the most common triggers for sundowning include end-of-day fatigue, being hungry or thirsty, presence from infection, and spending the day in an unfamiliar place. Alzheimer's appears to disrupt the brain's regulation of cycles of sleep and awake time

How to help calm an individual who is sundowning:

- Using reassuring language, not arguing with or correcting
- Looking for unmet needs
- Relocating your loved one to a quieter environment
- Occupying your loved one with a favorite activity
- Reminiscing about bedtime

The 7 R's of Managing behaviors

The most important thing to remember in managing behaviors of a loved one is the 7 R's:

- Reassure the person
- Review the possible causes
- Remove any triggers
- Redirect behavior or attention

- Restore yourself.
- Review what happened
- Reach out for help

7 Stages of Dementia

As you're caring for your loved one, it's also helpful to be aware of the seven stages of dementia, so that you can be aware of the common symptoms that come with each stage—preparing yourself to best support them throughout the process.

Stage 1: No Cognitive Decline

- There is no memory loss, confusion, or cognitive impairment

Stage 2: Very Mild Cognitive Decline

- Occasional memory gaps such as misplacing everyday items or forgetting names
- It's unlikely that symptoms impact jobs or social interactions at this stage

Stage 3: Mild Cognitive Decline

- Cognitive impairment becomes apparent
- Begin to forget words and family names
- Increasing social difficulties
- Poor work performance
- May start to get lost

Stage 4: Moderate Cognitive Decline

- A clinical interview will show a noticeable decline in abilities
- Unawareness of recent events presents itself
- Trouble recalling personal history
- Problems planning, traveling, and managing expenses

Stage 5: Moderately Severe Cognitive Decline

- May no longer be able to do things independently
- Trouble remembering phone number, address, etc.
- Confusion over the season, date, day of the week, etc.
- Difficulty making decisions

Stage 6: Severe Cognitive Decline

- May need extensive care
- Trouble remembering spouse, children, and caregivers
- Lack of awareness
- Wandering

Stage 7: Very Severe Cognitive Decline

- In the last stage of dementia, the brain loses contact with the body and can no longer tell it what to do
- Loses ability to move/talk
- Eating, walking, and using the bathroom will require support