

# Addressing Behaviors in Dementia

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# Overview

- Understand why behavioral symptoms may occur
- Understand how behavioral symptoms change with the stage of dementia
- Learn how to manage and prevent behavioral symptoms

# Behavioral Symptoms

- **Definition:** Behaviors judged to be inappropriate relative to the needs of the individual or situation
- **Cause:** Dementia destroys the part of the brain that controls behavior.
- Drugs used to control behavioral symptoms may worsen dementia.
- Use behavioral approaches to manage behavioral symptoms.
  - Get help at the [National Institute on Aging/Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center](#) site.

# Early-Stage Behaviors

Common behaviors in early stages of dementia include:

- Boredom and depression
- Personality and behavioral changes
- Complaints about memory
- Repeating questions

# Managing Early-Stage Symptoms

To manage behaviors, you might try:

- Prevention
  - Maintain structure
  - Simplify the environment
  - Provide written reminders
  - Give positive reinforcement throughout the day
- Responding
  - Watch for frustration and provide reassurance
  - Avoid “testing” memory
  - Get depression treated, if present

# Moderate-Stage Behaviors

New behaviors that show up may include:

- Wandering
- Arguing
- Sleep disturbances
- Agitation, hitting, biting

# Managing Moderate-Stage Behaviors

Address moderate-stage behaviors by:

- Prevention
  - Break tasks into small steps
  - Provide verbal reminders
- Responding
  - Be reassuring and offer simple answers
  - Let go of little things
  - Seek home and community-based services

# Late-Stage Behaviors

During the later stages of dementia, the person living with dementia may:

- Change eating and sleeping habits
- Have difficulty finding the “correct” words
- Show difficulty following instructions
- Become agitated
- Talk constantly



# Managing Late-Stage Behaviors

To address late-stage behaviors, consider:

- Prevention
  - Pay attention to non-verbal signs
  - Distract, touch gently
- Responding
  - Learn what the emotion is
  - Refocus and make a connection

# Make New Rules for Behaviors

- When old rules for addressing behavior cannot be enforced, use new rules.

## New Approaches for Dealing with Difficult Dementia Behaviors

- Examples include:
  - Not taking behaviors personally
  - Identifying/addressing feelings and emotions
  - Letting it go

# New Communication Approaches

When normal interactions do not work, new things to try might include:

- Speaking slowly, gently
- Keeping questions and answers simple
- Being patient and supportive
- Limiting distractions

# Simplify the Area

Create an environment that is safe, calm and predictable by:

- De-cluttering
- Making the environment safe
- Maintaining a constant environment

# Choosing Activities

A person living with dementia doesn't have to give up all activities that he or she loves.

- When choosing activities, consider the following:
  - Focus on enjoyment, not achievement
  - Encourage involvement in daily life
  - Do favorite activities
  - Physical limitations

# Make Activities Fun

Activities should bring joy.

- Focus on enjoyment, not achievement
- Consider time of day
- Adjust activities to disease stages
- Choose positive activities that you can do together.

# How to Approach Activities

- As the caregiver, you can:
  - Help get the activity started
  - Concentrate on the process, not the result
  - Be flexible with the help given
  - Encourage self-expression
  - Try again later

# Using Problem-Solving Methods

In order to be solved, a problem has to be recognized.

Start by

- Generating a list of behavioral symptoms
- Using trial and error to see what works
- Proposing possible solutions



# Tips on Managing Behaviors

Managing difficult behaviors is not easy.

The following sites provide helpful resources for caregivers so that you can better understand and manage difficult behaviors.

- [NIH's National Institute on Aging: Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias](#)
- [Alzheimer's Association's Alzheimer's and Dementia Caregiver Center](#) – navigate to the top menu and choose Stages & Behaviors

# Summary

- It is important to determine why behavioral symptoms occur.
- Strategies for managing symptoms differ by dementia stage.
- Use different strategies to manage and prevent behaviors.