

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.