



Understanding agitation

Many people living with dementia experience changes in behaviour. Understanding the causes of these changes can help you respond.

What is agitation?

Agitation is a state of anxiety or heightened emotional tension either physical or verbal.

What are the signs of agitation?

Agitation may be expressed by one or multiple signs below:

- Constantly calling out
- Distressed and/or irritable
- Picking at something like bedsheets
- Pacing, walking, unpacking drawers or removing clothes
- Unable to concentrate
- Visibly upset
- Easily angered and aggressive

‘Agitation can range from mild worry, where someone is clearly not sure what’s happening (and is constantly asking questions) through to someone experiencing aggression or anger including shouting and pushing a person away.’

Why do people living with dementia experience agitation?

There are many reasons why the person you care for may experience agitation.

- Environmental factors
- Over or under-stimulation
- Sleep disturbances
- Communication barriers
- Care approach
- Pain and infection

What can I do to help?

- Try to remain calm and avoid arguing or reasoning. Acknowledge how the person is feeling and reassure them.
- Ask or look for signs of pain and discomfort, such as wincing, grimacing, clenching teeth, groaning or frowning.
- Ask if they would like to go for a short walk for a change of scenery. Being outdoors can help improve a person's mood.
- Determine if they need comfort and reassurance or some space. Avoid bringing up the incident again and move on to something new.
- Ask the person's GP to check for infections if you notice a sudden change in behaviour.

This information has been compiled with the assistance of Professor Sue Kurrle, Geriatrician.

Disclaimer: This information is a guide only and is not a replacement for medical care by a qualified professional.



Is the change sudden and severe?

Is it a life threatening or emergency situation?

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365 days a year.**



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