



Understanding anxiety

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

What is anxiety?

While anxiety is a common behaviour people experience, for a person living with dementia, feeling anxious can trigger behaviors that impact care and quality of life.

What are the signs of anxiety?

When a person is experiencing anxiety, a person with dementia may:

- Sweat
- Display separation anxiety
- Shake or have palpitations
- Have a rapid pulse rate
- Show signs of nervousness - shortness of breath, sighing, being unable to relax, appearing excessively tense, shaky hands, reporting nausea
- Become flushed, restlessness
- Have disturbed sleep
- Worry excessively about finances, health, safety

‘Anxiety is common in people living with dementia. It can be very difficult to manage because it’s hard to know what it is that the person is anxious about. What are they scared of? What are they worried about? Understanding why the person is feeling anxious is really important.’

Why do people living with dementia experience anxiety?

There are a number of contributing factors that may cause a person living with dementia to feel anxious. These include (but are not limited to):

- Pain
- Medication
- Depression
- Being too hot or too cold
- Being hungry or thirsty
- Their environment
- Wearing uncomfortable clothes
- Confusion

Understanding the underlying cause of anxiety disorders is important to treat the behaviour.

What can I do to help?

- Think about routine: has there been any change to the person's usual activities or environment? Provide opportunities to be with people who are important to them and comfort them.
- Encourage activities they find relaxing, such as walking, gardening, reading or listening to music.
- Don't overwhelm the person with too much information at once. Offer information as you go.
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings and take the time to listen.
- Encourage the person to take ten gentle, slow breaths with you.

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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