



The Challenge of Dealing with Agitation

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As the caregiver for a person with dementia, you may deal with mild to severe agitation as one of the common symptoms of this disease. Since dementia affects the brain, changes in mood may occur frequently, leaving you feeling like you can't keep up with your loved one's needs.

It is difficult to know why your loved one reacts in certain ways and how to respond. Those with dementia may experience feelings of anxiety, fear, loss of control, and lack of security.

The Family Caregiver Alliance makes the following recommendations when dealing with agitation:

- * Reduce noise, clutter or the number of persons in the room.
- * Maintain structure by keeping the same routines. Keep household objects and furniture in the same places. Familiar objects and photographs offer a sense of security and can suggest pleasant memories.
- * Reduce caffeine intake, sugar and other foods that cause a spike in energy.
- * Try gentle touch, soothing music, reading or walks to quell agitation. Speak in a reassuring voice. Do not try to restrain the person during a period of agitation.
- * Keep dangerous objects out of reach.
- * Allow the person to do as much for him/herself as possible—support independence.
- * Acknowledge the confused person's anger over the loss of control in his life. Tell him you understand his frustration.
- * Distract the person with a snack or an activity. Allow him to forget the troubling incident. Confronting a confused person may increase anxiety.

Significant anxiety and agitation should also be addressed with your loved one's doctor to rule out medical causes.

As always remember the golden rule of caregiving: Take care of you! Time for you is essential in order to be an effective caregiver. Invest in finding support through neighbors, friends, church members, family, social service agencies and paid caregivers.