

Managing Behaviour Changes

Caregiving can present a host of new challenges, including developing strategies to manage some difficult or unwanted behaviour changes. These behaviours are the result of changes occurring within the brain. They can range from repetitive behaviours to aggression in some cases.

These behaviours may be new or recurring and may change over time, depending on the type of dementia, the individual experiencing symptoms and the environment or situation. In many cases behaviours can be managed by improving a caregiver's knowledge about dementia and improving communication with the person.

Maintaining good communication presents a number of challenges for people living with dementia and their family caregivers. Sometimes caregivers may need to become creative in their approach.

Identifying the cause of unwanted behaviours

As Dr. David Hogan, a specialist in dementia care stated, "All behaviour has meaning." It's important to re-evaluate the situation, seek and consider options, try a different approach and seek consultation of your family physician, if needed.

Behaviour can be interpreted as a form of communication, though it is often unclear what the person may be trying to communicate. It helps to try and understand what is happening to the person before, during and after the behaviour. This will help you identify the triggers for some of these behaviour changes. By removing these triggers, you might avoid the resulting undesirable behaviours.

Behaviours can sometimes indicate an unmet need. Any sudden change in behaviour may be due to a health condition such as a urinary tract infection, pain or discomfort, rather than due to the progression of dementia.

Non-pharmaceutical approaches should be tried first. These include providing reassurance and personal comfort, validating the expressed emotions of fear, anger or sadness and trying gentle distraction through favourite activities.

Some suggested strategies include:

- Checking for pain, hunger, thirst, constipation, full bladder, fatigue, infections and skin irritation
- Looking for reasons behind the behaviour and do not take the behaviour personally
- Validating and acknowledging the emotion and respond to the emotion
- Making sure the environment is calm and comfortable - lighting, temperature, noise level, and not too crowded
- Trying to avoid arguments or confrontations
- Allowing adequate rest between periods of activity and stimulation
- Redirecting the person's attention to a favourite activity or object

source: Alzheimer Society of Calgary, <http://www.alzheimercalgary.ca/living-with-dementia/caring-for-people-with-dementia/managing-behaviour-changes>

Safety Talk Discussion

Be Accountable: Choose safety - work safe - and go home injury free!