

Information for carers of someone with dementia: Coping with restlessness and agitation



Triggers and causes of restlessness and agitation and tips to help with this

There may be several reasons why the person you care for with dementia has become more restless since the COVID-19 restrictions on social distancing were put in place. Here are a few suggestions of what may contribute to these changes in and some tips and advice on how to support the person you are caring for.

1. Is the person with dementia (PWD) in pain?

It may be that the PWD is unable to communicate any discomfort that they are experiencing, and it is manifesting in restlessness and agitation. This link gives more information on how to find out if they are in pain - www.dementiauk.org/get-support/maintaining-health-in-dementia/pain-in-dementia/

- Make sure that they are taking medication as prescribed.
- Is clothing (waistbands, slippers etc.) uncomfortable, digging in or rubbing?
- Is the person too hot or cold?
- Is the person sitting or lying in one position for long periods of time and are they at risk of developing pressure sores? Encourage them to have a change of position or regular walk around the home throughout the day.
- If you are concerned that the person you care for is in pain contact their GP for a review.



2. Is the person constipated or do they have a urine infection?



Have there been changes to the person toilet habits, are they going to the toilet frequently through the day and night. Does the person complain of discomfort when they go to the toilet?

Does the person appear more confused than normal, has this been a sudden change in their presentation?

If you are concerned about this, please contact the GP to discuss the symptoms they are experiencing.

3. Is the person hungry or thirsty?

Some people with dementia may not be able to communicate or they may forget to eat regularly.

- Remember to offer drinks and food regularly throughout the day and encourage the person to drink.
- It may be that the PWD prefers several smaller meals and snacks during the day and it is a good idea to offer finger foods and food that is familiar to them.

4. Is the person you are caring for missing the physical exercise and activity that they were previously used to?

- If you are not shielding, remember that you can take daily exercise, and this may have a benefit to both the person you care for and your own health and wellbeing.
- If you have a garden, spending some time outside may be helpful in breaking up the day and ensuring you have some fresh air.
- If you are able to you could try some indoor exercises – you can find some suggestions here: www.carersinherts.org.uk/downloads/carers-support/coronavirus/1111-home-exercise-links-carers-in-hertfordshire/file
- The person you are caring for may pace in the home, there is often a reason for this check if they need the toilet or would like to go out for their daily walk/time in the garden. It may be that spending a lot of time indoors is unsettling. If it is not dangerous or causing distress then it is fine to let them do so.



5. Is the person you are caring for experiencing sleep disturbance?

- Try and ensure that the person has had enough activity during the day
- Try and keep a consistent bedtime.
- Make sure the bedroom environment is comfortable, consider blackout blinds if there is too much light.
- Make sure that the environment is safe, leave a light on in the hall or bathroom.
- Avoid too much caffeine during the day.
- Going for a walk, having a milky drink or a bath may help the person relax before bedtime
- If the person wakes up in the night try and gently remind them that it is still the nighttime, some people find a clock bedside the bed that shows if it is night or day is helpful.



6. The person you care for may be anxious and worried about the COVID-19 situation and changes to their routine.

Day to day routines may have changed (not seeing families and friend, not going to day centres).

- It may be useful to try to develop new routines at home, such as consistent times for meals and bed.
- Trying to limit the news to once a day (if this is upsetting for the person with dementia), instead choose more lighthearted or familiar TV programmes, quizzes, films or documentaries.
- Music can be very useful to help somebody feel more relaxed, think about music that you both enjoy or songs that remind you of past events.
- Boredom can cause agitation. Try giving the person with dementia small tasks to do such as folding laundry or try fiddle mats or a rummage box filled with interesting objects to hold and examine. Look at photographs together and use them to reminisce.
- Try to prevent over-stimulation. Very bright lights and loud noises can be distressing.

7. The person you care for may express false beliefs.

For example, the person with dementia might ask where their mother is or be trying to get home in time for the children to come back from school.

Be aware of these thoughts and beliefs and try not to argue. Instead, ask the person with dementia to tell you about their mother/children etc.



8. If the person you care for is becoming more restless in the afternoon or evening, consider that it may be sundowning

Information about this and ways to cope with it can be found at

www.dementiauk.org/get-support/understanding-changes-in-behaviour/sundowning/



If you need further support or information about caring for someone with dementia our Admiral Nurses are available to offer advice and reassurance. They can be contacted through Carers in Hertfordshire on 01992 58 69 69.