



Behavioral challenges in dementia

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia can be challenging and sometimes overwhelming. Learning helpful ways to address concerning behaviors can make tasks more manageable.



Pharmaceutical Assistance
Contract for the Elderly

Balanced information for better care

Are medications an option for behavioral symptoms?

The non-drug interventions discussed on the inside panels can be effective to deal with behavioral symptoms. In some cases, medication may be needed as well.

For agitation, medications like escitalopram (Lexapro) or sertraline (Zoloft) can help manage mood/behavior.

For behaviors that are **dangerous or distressing** to the patient or caregiver, other medications called antipsychotics may be an option.

Antipsychotic medications:

- can have unpleasant or dangerous side effects.
- should only be used for a limited time.
- require frequent reassessment.
- may increase the risk of death in older patients with dementia.

Before starting antipsychotics, talk about the risks and expected benefit with your healthcare professional.

Behaviors may change as dementia progresses

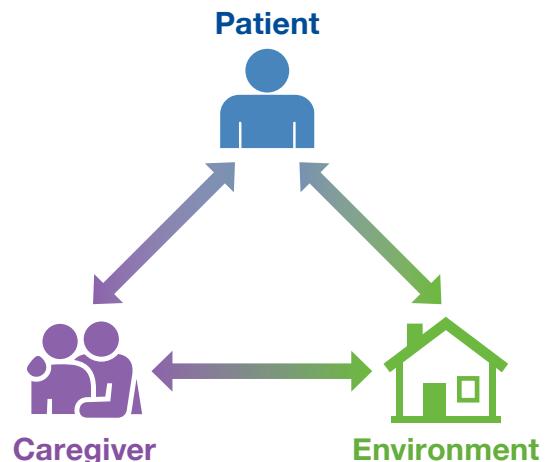
Over time, loved ones may develop new symptoms related to their dementia.

These behaviors can be:

- delusions and/or hallucinations
- agitation
- aggression
- anxiety
- apathy or indifference
- depression
- wandering

It is not always clear what is causing new behavioral challenges—you may need to think creatively and carefully about what is going on in your specific situation.

Behavioral symptoms can be affected by three key factors:



Common factors that can impact patient behavior, and interventions that may help:



Patient factors

Interventions

Can your loved one see and hear you?



- Are glasses or hearing aids needed? If used, do they need adjustment?

Are there any unmet needs?

- examples: pain, sleep problems, boredom, fear



- Is the patient getting enough/too much rest?
- Does the patient need activity?
- Is the patient expressing worry or fear of activities of daily living?

Is there a new health issue?

- infection
- medication side effect



- Talk to your healthcare professional if you suspect something new is causing changes in behavior.



Caregiver factors

Interventions

Are you stressed, burdened, or depressed?



- Are you taking care of yourself? Feeling your best can help you cope with stress.

Do you understand how behaviors and activities change as dementia progresses?



- Education on the stages of dementia can help: qrco.de/Alz_caregiving

Do you find you are frustrated/challenged when trying to communicate with your loved one?



- Dementia & caregiver classes are available:
 - dementiafriendsPA.org
 - Local area agency on aging: qrco.de/PDA_AAA



Environmental factors

Interventions

Is the environment over- or under-stimulating?



- Is the TV too loud/quiet? Is the area too busy or not busy enough?

Is the environment safe?



- Get home safety tips at qrco.de/Alz_safety

Are activities needed?



- Try activities your loved one enjoys.
- Create a daily schedule.

The Independent Drug Information Service (IDIS) is supported by the PACE Program of the Department of Aging of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This material is provided by Alosa Health, a nonprofit organization which accepts no funding from any pharmaceutical company. IDIS is a program of Alosa Health.

Additional support for this module has been provided by the John A. Hartford Foundation.

These are general recommendations only; specific clinical decisions should be made by the treating clinician based on an individual patient's clinical condition.

AlosaHealth.org



Pharmaceutical Assistance
Contract for the Elderly



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF AGING



IDIS

Independent Drug
Information Service



**Alosa
Health**

Balanced information for better care