Are medications an option for behavioral symptoms?

The non-drug interventions discussed on the inside panels can often be a safe and effective way 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 such as antipsychotics may in rare cases be required.

Antipsychotic medications:

- can have unpleasant or dangerous side effects.
- should only be used for a limited time, to address specific target behaviors.
- 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.

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

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Balanced information for better care

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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 life more manageable.

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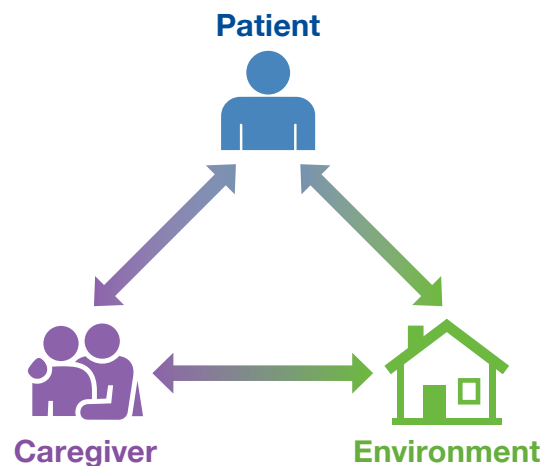Balanced information for better care

Behaviors may change as dementia progresses

Over time, loved ones may develop new symptoms caused by their dementia. These might include:

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

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

Behavioral symptoms can be affected by three key factors:

Patient

Caregiver   **Environment**

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

Patient factors

Interventions

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, such as: – a medication side effect? – infection or another medical problem?	• Talk to your healthcare professional if you suspect something new is causing changes in behavior.

Caregiver factors

Interventions

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 resources: – **qrco.de/TX_Caregivers** – Local area agency on aging: **qrco.de/TX_AAA**

Environmental factors

Interventions

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?	• Identify activities that your loved one enjoys. • Create a consistent daily schedule.