



**SENIOR SERVICES**  
Helping Our Elderly Live With Dignity

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## Understanding Behaviors of People with Alzheimer's Disease or Related Dementia

People with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia may experience a range of behaviors that can be frustrating for caregivers. Some may develop behavioral challenges early on, while others may go their entire illness with only minor issues. Often there are ups and downs, with some good days and some bad ones. Behaviors can also vary from moment to moment.

Anticipating this and maintaining patience, compassion and a sense of humor will help you cope more effectively with challenging behaviors. It's important to remember that it's the disease, not the person, causing the behavior.

### Agitation

Try to determine what might have caused an agitated response. It could be an event or action that just occurred or something related to their physical and emotional health such as physical discomfort, fatigue, medication, or disruption of sleep pattern. Determining the cause may help in preventing a similar response in the future.

- If your loved one with Alzheimer's disease or dementia becomes agitated, approach them slowly and from the front. Approaching from the side or behind may startle them. Gently guide the person to a quiet area away from people until they calm down. Speak slowly and in a calm and reassuring voice.
- Some people respond well to gentle physical touch. Music and quiet readings can be calming.
- Try not to reason or rationalize with the agitated person. This often leads to increased frustration and anger.
- Keep daily routines as consistent as possible, avoiding change and surprise.

### Paranoia & Hallucinations

People with Alzheimer's disease or dementia may see, hear, smell, taste or feel something that does not exist. They may also blame people for things. It's important to remember that these behaviors are not within their control. It's due to the disease and the damage to the brain.

- Respond to the feelings the person is expressing. Be reassuring and comforting. Distract your loved one by getting them to focus on another topic or activity.
- Avoid watching certain programs on TV such as violence. People with Alzheimer's disease or dementia may not be able to differentiate TV from reality or they may think the events are happening to them. If necessary, change the home environment particularly lighting, to avoid shadows or reflections.

## **Paranoia & Hallucinations (cont.)**

- Do not directly disagree with a false idea by arguing. State what you know to be true, then distract them.
- Do not scold for losing or hiding items, instead look for or assist in looking for the lost item. Learn their favorite “hiding places.”
- Hallucinations and false ideas are best ignored or accepted if they are harmless and do not upset the person who is experiencing them.

## **Wandering**

Some people with Alzheimer’s disease or dementia tend to wander inside the home, or they may go outside thinking they have to go someplace such as to a job. There are numerous possible causes for wandering. A person may misinterpret sights or sounds and become afraid. Or they may become anxious, restless, or agitated. The following tips may help you cope with wandering.

- Allow the person to wander if the environment is safe and secure. Remove items that may trigger the person to go outside such as their coat or purse.
- Walk with the person around the neighborhood or in a mall. Physical activity often reduces agitation that leads to wandering.
- Take a drive in the car, making sure the doors are locked. Never leave your memory impaired loved one unattended in a car.
- If your loved one feels lost, disoriented or confused, reassure them in a calm, normal tone of voice. Tell them where they are.
- If a person has wandered off, and you spot them, do not shout their name. Instead calmly catch up with them, walking with them to match their pace. Gently guide them back to safety.
- Make sure the person carries some form of identification or has a Safe Return identification bracelet or necklace (for more information on Safe Return contact Alzheimer’s Association 1-888-572-8566).
- Modify the home to make it safe. Keep doors locked. You may have to install electronic buzzers or bells to signal when a door is opened. Make sure any gates stay locked.

It is important for caregivers to recognize that actual damage to areas of the brain has occurred as a result of Alzheimer’s disease or dementia. Behaviors and personality may be affected. Your patience and understanding will help both you and your loved one in coping with the changes and managing the behaviors.