

Alzheimer's and Agitation

As the Alzheimer's disease (AD) progresses, most people experience agitation in addition to memory loss. In the early stages, people may experience personality changes such as irritability, anxiety, or depression. As the disease progresses, other symptoms may occur including sleep disturbances, delusions, hallucinations, pacing, constant movement or restlessness, checking and rechecking door locks or appliances, tearing tissues, general emotional distress, and uncharacteristic cursing or threatening language.

Agitation may be caused by a number of different medical conditions and drug interactions or by any circumstances that worsen the person's ability to think. Situations that may lead to agitated behavior include moving to a new residence or nursing home, other changes in the environment or caregiver arrangements, misperceived threats, or fear and fatigue resulting from trying to make sense out of a confusing world.

A person exhibiting agitated behavior should receive a thorough medical evaluation especially when agitation comes on suddenly. The treatment of agitation depends on a careful diagnosis, determination of the possible causes, and the types of agitated behavior the person is experiencing. With proper treatment and intervention, significant reduction or stabilization of the symptoms can often be achieved.

There are two distinct types of treatments for agitation: behavioral interventions and prescription medications. Behavioral treatments should be tried first. In general, steps to managing agitation include (1) identifying the behavior, (2) understanding its cause, and (3) adapting the caregiving environment to remedy the situation.

To prevent or reduce agitated behaviors the caregiver should create a calm environment by removing stressors, triggers, or danger; move the person to a quieter place, change expectations, offer security object, rest or privacy; limit caffeine use; provide opportunity for exercise; develop soothing rituals; and use gentle reminders.

Crockett Resource Center for Independent Living (CRCIL) host a bi-monthly support group for caregivers, family members, and people with Alzheimer's on the first and third Tuesday of each month. The next meeting of the Alzheimer's Support group will be held on Tuesday, April 18th, 2017 at 10:00 a.m. CRCIL is located at 1020 Loop 304 East in Crockett, Texas. CRCIL's Alzheimer's Support Group is free, confidential, and anonymous. For more information about AD or to find out about the monthly support group, contact Debbie Oliver at CRCIL at 936-544-2811.