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## Dementia complications

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By Micha Shalev

### Why do people who have dementia become agitated?

Agitation can be caused by many factors. A sudden change in surroundings or frustrating situations can cause people who have dementia to become agitated. For example, getting dressed or giving the wrong answer to a question may cause frustration. Being challenged about the confusion or an inability to do things caused by the dementia may also make the person agitated. As a result, the person may cry, become irritable, or try to hurt others in some way.

### How can I deal with agitation?

One of the most



important things you can do is avoid situations in which your loved one might become frustrated. Try to make your loved one's tasks less difficult. For example,

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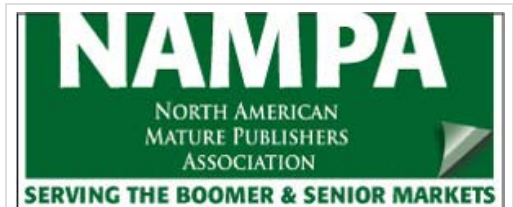


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instead of expecting him or her to get dressed alone, try having them just put on only piece of the outfit (such as a jacket) on their own.

You can also try to limit the number of difficult situations your loved one must face. For example, if taking a bath or shower causes problems, have him or her take one every other day instead of every day. Also, you can schedule difficult activities for a time of day when your loved one tends to be less agitated. It's helpful to give frequent reassurance and avoid contradicting them.

#### What should I do if hallucinations are a problem?

If hallucinations are not making your loved one scared or anxious, you don't need to do anything. It's better not to confront people who have dementia about their hallucinations. Arguing may just upset them. However, if hallucinations are scary or upsetting, you can try to distract them by involving them in a pleasant activity.

#### What if my loved one will not go to sleep at night?

- Try one or more of the following:
- Try to make them more aware of what time of day it is. Place clocks where they can see them.
- Keep curtains or blinds open so that they can tell when it is daytime and when it is nighttime.
- Limit the amount of caffeine they consume.
- Try to help your loved one get some exercise every day.
- Don't let them take too many naps during the day.
- Make their bedroom peaceful. It is easier to sleep in a quiet room.
- At night, provide a night light or leave a dim light on. Total darkness can add to confusion.
- If they have arthritis or another painful condition that interrupts their sleep, ask your doctor if it is okay to give your loved one medicine for pain right before bed.

#### What if wandering becomes a problem?

Sometimes very simple things can help with this problem. It is all right for your loved one to wander in a safe place, such as in a fenced yard. By providing a safe place, you may avoid confrontation. If this doesn't work, remind them not to go out a certain door by placing a stop sign on it or by putting a piece of furniture in front of it. A ribbon tied across a door can serve as a similar reminder. Hiding the doorknob by placing a strip of cloth over it may also be helpful.

An alarm system will alert you that your loved one is trying to leave a certain area. Your alarm system could be something as just a few empty cans tied to a string on the doorknob. You might have to place special locks on the doors, but be aware that such locks might be dangerous if a house fire occurs. Don't use this method if your loved one will be left home alone. Make sure they wear a medical bracelet with their name, address and medical conditions, in case they wander away from home.

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