

Understanding Behaviours in Dementia



Learn More +
Take Action

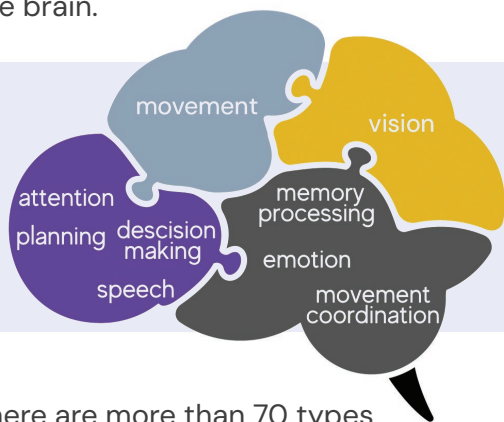


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Dementia 101

Dementia is a chronic brain (or neurocognitive) disorder that causes changes in a person's memory, thinking, moods and behaviours. These changes often start small and worsen over time due to ongoing damage happening within the brain.



There are more than 70 types of dementia; the most common are Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia and Lewy body dementia. Each type of dementia includes different symptoms. Some types progress slowly, and some types progress more quickly.

No matter the type of dementia, changed moods or behaviours are not deliberate and they are not always a problem. If changes in moods or behaviours become concerning there are evidence-informed approaches that can help.

With support, people with dementia can lead active and fulfilling lives after their diagnosis.

Symptom Checklist

Most people with dementia will experience changes in their moods and behaviours. These changes are called behaviours in dementia. Other terms that are used to describe this are the behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD) or responsive behaviours.

Behaviours can be an attempt to communicate discomfort and distress when people with dementia have difficulty expressing their physical and emotional needs or making sense of their environment.

It may be expressed as:

DEPRESSION

Restlessness anxiety

HOARDING yelling

Disorientation

Explicit Sexual Behaviour

Shadowing hallucinations

apathy **DISTURBED SLEEP**

ANGER Delusions

We can respond to behaviours in dementia in ways that are compassionate, respectful and supportive.

Factors that may increase behaviours in dementia

Behaviours in dementia can be hard to understand because they result from many factors, like:

Environmental, Social & Emotional Factors

- Loneliness and/or grief
- Over or under stimulation
- Discomfort due to noise, temperature or light
- Untreated depression or other mental illness
- Decreased ability to communicate
- Upsetting interpersonal interactions
- Relocation to a new environment
- Misunderstood assistance with personal care

Physical Factors

- Limited mobility
- Thirst or hunger
- Poor vision or hearing
- Side effects of medications
- Pain or physical discomfort
- Incontinence

Responding well to behaviours in dementia

Interactive, social (also called psychosocial) approaches may be effective in preventing, supporting or resolving behaviours in dementia.

These approaches include activities that engage the person's unique background, interests and capabilities, like:

- Reminiscing about growing up or career,
- Listening to music playlists or audio books,
- Adapted fitness, swimming or walking programs,
- Helping with chores and tasks.

Medications may be considered when physical or environmental reasons for the behaviours are unclear, and psychosocial approaches do not help.



Things you can do to support someone with behaviours in dementia

- Meet them where they are – affirm and enjoy their current reality.
- Keep things calm – avoid situations and people that may be triggering.
- Avoid conflict – try not to correct mistakes or argue.
- Maintain meaning and purpose – continue and promote leisure, cultural and spiritual activities.
- Keep involved with friends and family – small groups are often best.
- Have a routine – support orientation to time, day and keep things as consistent as possible.
- Allow plenty of time – avoid crowding the day or rushing the person.
- Identify the best time of day, when the person is most alert and most likely to be successful to do the important things.
- Keep choices simple and support decision making by offering 2 options and use visual clues where possible.
- Help start activities that they can then take over and continue.
- Support emotional expression and validate emotions (eg. “You look upset.”)



What works one day may not work the next. Stay flexible and be creative.

Learn more about behaviours in dementia

Your doctor or nurse practitioner can refer you to health care providers with expertise in behaviour in dementia, such as:

- Specialist doctors like geriatric psychiatrists, neurologists and geriatricians who assess, diagnose and treat behaviours in dementia.
- Behavioural support specialists who provide assessment and care planning, along with mentoring for care partners.
- Allied health providers, like occupational therapists, therapeutic recreation practitioners, social workers, and mental health professionals who guide person-centered interventions and provide group program opportunities.

You can also explore local community resources, like programs by the Alzheimer Society, Memory Cafés, adult day programs, peer support groups and adapted recreation programs to find social connections and physical fitness programs.

Visit our website

to access free, practical and evidence-informed resources to support people experiencing behaviours in dementia

BehavioursInDementia.ca



**Behaviours in
Dementia
Toolkit**

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Find more information to support
the mental health and wellbeing
of older adults at:

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