

ANXIETY AND AGITATION IN THOSE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA



From the Desk of Jaime Goddard-Stern, BSN

People living with dementia and Alzheimer's often experience anxiety or agitation. Think about it, wouldn't you have anxiety if you were losing control of your independence? No matter what stage of dementia someone is in, they will experience this. Most caregivers are not prepared for this and are overwhelmed when they experience it.

I am often asked, what causes this and why do they act this way? It is simple, there is an unmet need present and they are trying to accomplish it. Whether they have to use the restroom, are hungry or uncomfortable, as caregivers, it is our job to figure out what that unmet need is and fulfill it. Ideally, we would like to prevent the anxiety or agitation before it starts, so ensuring they are toileted, fed and comfortable are priority.

Tips from Experience in Managing Dementia

Keeping a Routine is key

- Keep a regular schedule including time for bathroom breaks about every two hours.
- Serve meals at the same time daily. Schedule household 'tasks' for opportunities to contribute and achieve goals.

Use Distraction and simple tasks with praise

- Try soothing music from a genre they enjoy. Music can be calming, helping reduce anxiety and agitation.
- Assign a simple task that can be successfully accomplished. Keep in mind, you never want to set them up for failure. Give them something to do that you know they can accomplish and give praise when completed.
- Women are by nature 'nurturers'. Keeping a tidy household may be very satisfying and simple tasks like sweeping, folding laundry or doing dishes can be fulfilling. Helping with meal preparation, such as washing vegetables or stirring the food in the pot are simple things that can go a long way.

To sum it up, caring for someone living with dementia or Alzheimer's disease is not easy. There will be ups and downs throughout this dementia journey. Keeping your loved one's dignity intact and giving them purpose is a huge accomplishment for caregivers!



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