

# Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia

A person with dementia may begin to think, feel and behave differently due to their condition.

These changes are called the behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD) and are common.

At times they can be distressing and challenging for the person, as well as relatives, carers and other residents.

This factsheet describes some of the common symptoms.



**We must remember to look at a person as a whole.** Other issues like infection, pain or medication side effects could also be causing changes in behaviour.

## Delusions

Having a very fixed belief about something which is not true.

Although it is not real to us, it feels very real to the person.

People are stealing things  
The house is not home  
Spouse/carer is an imposter  
Spouse has been unfaithful



## Hallucinations

Seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling or feeling things that are not there.

Although it is not real to us, it feels very real to the person. Seeing or hearing people, small children, animals.



## Anxiety

Feelings of worry or nervousness about what might happen in the future.

Fear of being left alone  
Asking the same question over and over  
Looking for family/carers  
Wanting reassurance  
Picking at skin/clothes



## Depression

Constant feelings of sadness over a long period of time.



Sadness and withdrawal  
Low self esteem  
Loss of interest in activities  
Change in appetite and sleep  
Wanting to die or hurt self

## Apathy

A loss of interest. This includes in activities, personal care and whilst interacting with others. Apathy is not the same as laziness!

Not wanting to join in activities  
Talking to other people less  
Fewer facial expressions



## Misidentification

Wrongly recognising things such as people, places, objects or events.

Not recognising own reflection in the mirror  
Trying to pick objects from patterned carpet  
Someone else is living in the home (phantom boarder)



## Agitation

Restlessness which could be due to anxiety, frustration, pain.

Repeating tasks such as dressing/ undressing  
Repeating sentences and questions  
Pacing up and down  
Hiding things  
Picking at skin/clothes



## Disinhibition

A loss of inhibitions. Inhibitions are self-conscious feelings about the things we say and do.

Swearing  
Sexual or rude comments  
Undressing in public areas  
Out of character behaviour  
Grabbing other people



## Walking with Purpose

Many people with dementia feel the urge to walk about and sometimes even leave the home. This might be due to:

Boredom, feeling lost  
Seeking activity/exercise  
Looking for someone/something  
Part of their old routine  
Sun downing – a change in routine



## Complaining

People with dementia may complain to staff and relatives. They may sometimes even accuse, which can be challenging.

Often based on hallucinations/delusions such as somebody is stealing

The person wants to be listened to



## Extreme Reactions

Sudden emotional or physical response which might seem unreasonable.

Rapid changes in emotion  
Throwing things  
Swearing  
Shouting or screaming  
Crying or laughing



## Aggression

This can be verbal and physical. The person may be trying to tell us their feelings or needs.

Hitting  
Screaming, shouting, swearing  
Pushing  
Grabbing things/people  
Kicking and biting

