

Coping With Agitation And Aggression In Alzheimer's Disease

People with Alzheimer's disease may become agitated or aggressive as the disease gets worse. Agitation means that a person is restless or worried. He or she doesn't seem to be able to settle down. Agitation may cause pacing, sleeplessness, or aggression, which is when a person lashes out verbally or tries to hit or hurt someone.

Causes Of Agitation And Aggression

Most of the time, agitation and aggression happen for a reason. When they happen, try to find the cause. If you deal with the causes, the behavior may stop. For example, the person may have:

- [Pain](#), [depression](#), or stress
- [Too little rest or sleep](#)
- [Constipation](#)
- Soiled underwear or diaper
- Sudden change in a well-known place, routine, or person
- A feeling of loss—for example, the person may miss the freedom to [drive](#)
- Too much noise or confusion or too many people in the room
- Being pushed by others to do something—for example, to [bathe](#) or to remember events or people—when Alzheimer's has made the activity very hard or impossible
- Feeling lonely and not having enough contact with other people
- [Interaction of medicines](#)



Look for early signs of agitation or aggression. If you see the signs, you can deal with the cause before [problem behaviors](#) start. Try not to ignore the problem. Doing nothing can make things worse.

A doctor may be able to help. He or she can give the person a medical exam to find any problems that may cause agitation and aggression. Also, [ask the doctor](#) if medicine is needed to prevent or reduce agitation or aggression.

Tips For Coping With Agitation or Aggression

Here are some ways you can cope with agitation or aggression:

- Reassure the person. [Speak calmly](#). Listen to his or her concerns and frustrations. Try to show that you understand if the person is angry or fearful.
- Allow the person to keep as much control in his or her life as possible.
- Try to keep a routine, such as bathing, dressing, and eating at the same time each day.
- Build quiet times into the day, along with [activities](#).
- Keep well-loved objects and photographs around the house to help the person feel more secure.
- Try gentle touching, soothing music, reading, or walks.
- Reduce noise, clutter, or the number of people in the room.
- Try to distract the person with a favorite snack, object, or activity.
- Limit the amount of caffeine the person drinks and eats.



Here are some things you can do:

- Slow down and try to relax if you think your own worries may be affecting the person with Alzheimer's.
- Try to find a way to take a break from caregiving.

Safety Concerns

When the person is aggressive, protect yourself and others. If you have to, stay at a safe distance from the person until the behavior stops. Also try to [protect the person](#) from hurting himself or herself.

We Can Help!

Alzheimer's Orange County

Call 844.373.4400

For more caregiver tips

Visit us at:
www.alzoc.org/resources

Information taken from the National Institute on Aging, part of the National Institutes of Health

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health> | NIH May 2017 | Reviewed by AlzOC June 2022