

Behavioral And Psychological Symptoms Of Dementia: Hallucination

Due to changes in the brain caused by dementia, some people may experience hallucinations (included, but not limited to the following). These can occur at any stage of dementia and can take different forms:

- Visual hallucinations, i.e. seeing family members who had already passed away
- Auditory hallucinations, i.e. hearing voice whisper to his/her ear when there is no one near him/her
- Tactile hallucinations, i.e. feeling ants crawling on the body when there is no ants

Some hallucinations may be frightening, while others may involve common visions of people, situations or objects from the past.



"Mum says daddy is asking her to go and cook dinner for him. But daddy passed away 5yrs ago!"

What is happening?

- All behaviours have meaning, so it is important to understand why the person with dementia might act a certain way.
- Family members play an important role to provide support and understanding what might be causing the behaviour.

"Mum might be missing daddy, and cooking dinner for him is what she used to do for him everyday!"

Tips on how to manage hallucination behaviour:

Offer reassurance and acknowledge the feelings behind the hallucination

- Be patient, listen to them, allow them to express their thoughts and feelings openly.
- Acknowledge the emotions associated with the hallucination and try to find out what the hallucination means to the individual.
- Respond in a calm and supportive manner.



- If the hallucination is pleasant, you may leave it alone and acknowledge their feelings. i.e. Mom is having hallucination and seeing dad who passed away long ago. You may respond as “Mum, I can see that you love daddy a lot! What do you usually like to cook for him?”
- If the hallucination is unpleasant and frightening, respond by saying “Don’t worry, I am here. I will protect you! I will take care of you!”
- Gentle patting the person may redirect their attention and reduce the intensity of the hallucination.



Use distraction

- Divert their attention by talking about something else that they enjoy, instead of dwelling on negative emotions.
- Suggest going for a walk or moving to another room. Frightening hallucinations often subside in well-lit areas where other people are present.
- Try to engage the person in music, conversation, or activities that you both enjoy together.



Environmental Cues

- Check for sounds that might be misinterpreted, such as noise from a television or an air conditioner.
- Look for lighting that casts shadows, reflections or distortions on the surfaces of floors, walls and furniture. Turn on lights to reduce shadows.
- Cover mirrors with a cloth or remove them if the person thinks that he or she is looking at a stranger.



Seek help

Please seek professional help if the behaviour is unmanageable. Sometimes, hallucinations will require medication, especially if they are frightening or affecting well-being.



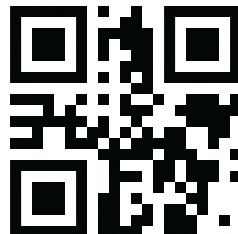
Available resources for caregivers:

Dementia Singapore



Dementia Helpline:
6377 0700

CARA SG



Contributed by Nursing and Psychology, Allied Health Services

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