

# Behavioral And Psychological Symptoms In Dementia: Hallucination

Due to the disease process and damage to the brain, person with dementia may experience hallucination. It may happen at any stage of dementia. Hallucination may come in different forms, namely:

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

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



“Mum says daddy is asking her to go and cook dinner for him. But daddy has passed away 5yrs ago! What is happening?”

## What should I do?

- All behaviours have meaning, it is important to understand why the person with dementia is behaving in a particular way.
- Family members play an important role to provide support and understanding, try to elucidate what may be triggering 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.
- Acknowledge the feeling behind 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 already passed away long time 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, you may respond as “Don’t worry, I am here. I will protect you! I will take care of you!”
- Gentle patting may turn the person's attention towards you and reduce the hallucination.



### **Use distraction**

- Divert their attention, talk about something else that they enjoy instead of dwelling in negative emotion.
- Suggest a walk or move to another room. Frightening hallucinations often subside in well-lit areas where other people are present.
- Try to turn the person's attention to music, conversation or activities you enjoy together.



## Environment

- 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 hallucination will require medication, especially if the hallucination is frightening or affecting well-being.

