

Mood Changes and Dementia

Category : Alzheimers Disease/Dementia

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"...Trying to help care for a parent who is showing uncharacteristic mood swings or angry outbursts can be difficult under the best of circumstances. " Recorded live at the [KEOM 88.5FM, Mesquite Schools Radio](#) studios, this segment of the Community Focus program looks at mood swings and angry behavior. You can read the script by clicking [READ MORE](#).

Dr. G: What is today's topic today, Barb?

Barb: Today's topic is about how adult children can better cope with some of the mood changes that elderly parents may experience - especially those with dementia, or specifically, Alzheimer's disease. Trying to help care for a parent who is showing uncharacteristic mood swings or angry outbursts can be difficult under the best of circumstances.

Dr. G: So, what should caregivers know about ways to care for persons with dementia who are showing some of these behaviors?

Barb: Well, I would like to start out by saying that these changes in behavior are not unusual - actually, they are more common than many people realize. As the Alzheimer's patient's brain is affected by the disease process, changes in memory, thinking, and behavior may occur. Although problems with remembering and thinking can be difficult, when an elderly parent seems to be increasingly aggressive or angry, it can be stressful or even frightening for the caregiver.

Likewise, it's just tough for the adult child to realize that the behavior is probably related to the disease and not against them. So, understanding that changing moods and behavior and unreasonable accusations or angry outbursts are not unusual and probably not personally directed at the caregiver, are key points to remember. Secondly, sudden behavior changes in a person with dementia may be caused by a physical problem or drug reaction or negative interaction - in this case, call your doctor for an evaluation as soon as possible.

Dr. G.: That certainly seems important to understand about behavior and dementia. How can an adult child deal with an elderly parent who is acting out or seems uncharacteristically unreasonable?

First, after your doctor checks for other causes related to aggressive behavior, it may be good to look at the feeling that is behind your parent's behavior. That angry outburst may really be caused by fear or anxiety about something that's going on: trying to see what is causing the outbursts may help to avoid the problem next time.

See if there's a pattern to these episodes. For example, if every time you're preparing to leave the house - and even though your sister Sue is going to stay with your mom - you notice that your mother starts to become agitated and begins accusing you of planning to abandon her, it may help to understand that she is really just afraid of being separated from you. In this case, reassure her that

you will be coming back in a hour and that Sue will take good care of her. The point is this: try to understand what the feeling is that's behind the behavior.

Some other suggestions about coping with mood changes associated with more advanced levels of dementia are:

Try to not rationalize or argue . . . try to accept your parent where they are at with their level of dementia and keep responses simple.

Be aware of your own body language - if you are looking upset and stressed, your parent may sense this and feel anxious, too.

Try to keep a routine and schedule for your parent. This can help calm their fears about the unknown or any changes in their day.

Try to allow plenty of time when preparing to go out with your parent. Trying to rush them along will probably only increase their stress and anger.

Try to redirect unsafe or undesirable behavior. So if your parent is preparing to walk out the front door at 11:00 pm because it's time to go to work, try distracting him by calmly explaining that you'll be glad to take him to work but first you'll have to find the umbrella because they are predicting rain or anything else you can think of to redirect their focus of attention.

In summary, as difficult as it may be to deal with aggression or mood changes related to dementia, there are ways that may help the adult child as they try to care for their elderly parent. For more suggestions about how to deal with difficult behavior and mood changes related to Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, contact the Alzheimer's Association in your community or call the national association at 800-272-3900. On the internet, you can reach the Alzheimer's Association at www.alz.org. There you also can find a wealth of information about other issues related to this disease.

Dr. G.: That sounds like helpful information for our listeners, Barb. I believe that individuals who have questions about this topic can also contact you at ElderHope - what's your telephone and website address?

Our phone is 972-768-8553 and our website address is www.elderhope.com.