ST. FRANCIS 24/7 CALL CENTER: (321) 269-4240

St. Francis REFLECTIONS® Hospice
Established 1977 • Licensed 1990

Dementia

Dementia is a broad term used to describe a decline in cognitive function severe enough to interfere with daily life. It is characterized by memory loss, confusion, impaired reasoning, and changes in behavior and mood. There are several types of dementia, with Alzheimer's disease being the most common, but others include vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, and frontotemporal dementia.

Common Symptoms:

Symptoms may differ from person to person

- **Early symptoms can include:**
  - Memory lapses
  - Difficulty finding words
  - Difficulty with daily tasks.
- **Disease progression symptoms worsen leading to:**
  - Confusion
  - Agitation
  - Wandering
  - Difficulty swallowing
  - Incontinence

Causes:

Potential causes:

- The exact cause is unknown, however dementia results from damage to brain cells that interfere with the brain's ability to communicate. The causes vary by type. For example, Alzheimer's disease is associated with the buildup of amyloid plaques and tau tangles, while vascular dementia is caused by reduced blood flow to the brain..

Hospice Considerations:

There is no cure for dementia, but treatments focus on managing symptoms.

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- **Significant Weight Loss**: Weight loss and malnutrition due to difficulty eating or forgetting to eat.
- **Frequent Infections:** When the patient experiences recurring infections like pneumonia or urinary tract infections.
- **Severe Cognitive Decline:** When the patient no longer recognizes loved ones, is unable to communicate, or is showing signs of severe cognitive decline, hospice care can help manage their final stages.

Symptom Management Tips:

- **Agitation and Anxiety:** Dementia patients can become easily upset or anxious. Use calming strategies such as playing soothing music, providing comforting items (like blankets), or engaging in gentle activities like walking.
- **Aggression:** In later stages, aggression can emerge due to confusion. Remain calm, avoid confrontation, and offer distractions like a favorite activity or snack.
- **Sundowning:** Many dementia patients become more confused and agitated in the late afternoon or evening. To manage this, keep lighting bright in the evening, maintain a routine, and avoid stimulating activities near bedtime.
- **Eating and Drinking:** As dementia progresses, the patient may forget to eat or drink. Serve finger foods, use adaptive utensils, and offer small, frequent meals as tolerated. Encourage fluids ass tolerated to prevent dehydration.
- **Mobility:** Dementia patients may become less mobile as the disease progresses. Help them move regularly if able to avoid pressure ulcers and stiffness.

How to Help:

- **Patient Tips:**
  - **Focus on Routine:** Try to stick to familiar routines, and ask for help when needed. This can reduce anxiety and confusion.
  - **Stay Social:** Engage with family and friends when possible to maintain emotional well-being.
  - **Work with Caregivers:** Rely on your caregiver for reminders, assistance, and help with daily activities.

- **Caregiver Tips:**
  - **Patience:** Remain patient, as tasks may take longer to complete, and confusion can cause frustration for the patient.
  - **Support System:** Build a support system for yourself, including respite care options, friends, family, and hospice staff.
  - **Simplify Tasks:** Break down activities into simple steps, offering guidance or assistance as needed without taking over entirely.

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- **Promote Comfort:** Encourage activities that the patient enjoys, such as listening to favorite music or looking at photo albums.

St. Francis Reflections is always available to assist with any questions or concerns 24/7

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