

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

Elder Abuse / Dealing with Difficult Behaviors in Alzheimer's

Abuse can happen to any older person, but often affects those who depend on others for help with activities of everyday life—including bathing, dressing, and taking medicine. Most victims of abuse are women. The most likely targets are older people who have no family or friends nearby and people with disabilities or dementia. One in ten adults over age 60 are abused, neglected or financially exploited.

Types of Elder Abuse

Sometimes caregivers become exhausted, and resentment starts to build, especially when caring for someone with dementia or a very difficult or abusive person. Elder abuse can take many forms:

- **Neglect**—Failure to fulfill a caretaking obligation constitutes more than half of all reported cases of elder abuse. It can be *intentional* or *unintentional*, based on factors such as ignorance or denial that an elderly person needs as much care as he or she does. This can be refusing to provide food, medicine and personal care, such as bathing or helping a person with toileting; over-medicating; or withholding eyeglasses, dentures or walking aids.
- **Physical violence**—Slapping, kicking or sexual abuse. Physical elder abuse is a non-accidental

use of force against an elderly person that results in physical pain, injury, or impairment. Such abuse includes not only physical assaults such as hitting or shoving but the inappropriate use of drugs, restraints, or confinement.

- **Emotional abuse**—Intentionally keeping the person from friends and family; verbally attacking or demeaning him.
- **Financial abuse**—Stealing money, credit cards or property; tricking a senior into signing documents, such as wills.

If a senior's behavior changes and appears to be fearful of a caregiver or family member and you suspect elder abuse, contact the **Adult Protective Services Agency** in your county department of human services or call your local **Area Agency on Aging** for guidance. **If someone you care about is in imminent danger, call 911 NOW.** If your concern is for someone who lives in another state, call the **Eldercare Locator** at 800-677-1116 for in-state help-line phone numbers. All these hotlines are free and anonymous.



Source: National Institutes of Health; CDC

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Dealing with Difficult Behaviors in Alzheimer's

In your caregiving you will find some Alzheimer's disease (AD) behaviors more difficult to deal with than others. You will need to learn skillful ways of coping both with the behavior and how to keep yourself from caregiver burnout.

Your reaction depends on how you *interpret* the behavior. If you can think of these behaviors as the person with Alzheimer's way of communicating what she needs and feels or what is upsetting her, you may have an easier time responding calmly.

Check if the person in your care may be—

- feeling ill, in pain, overtired or having a reaction to a medication
- not able to understand what you want her to do or just not in the mood for what you have in mind
- bored, overstimulated or just having a bad day—symptoms often vary from day-to-day.

Check if *you* are—

- trying to make her do something at a different time of day
- expecting too much for her skills or rushing her
- giving too many directions at once
- speaking in an angry or bossy way or acting stressed out.



Physically Aggressive Behavior

People with AD may become physically aggressive, although this does not occur as often as people think. They may sometimes throw things, hit, kick, bite, or pinch the caregiver. They may not know why they are doing this, and they may not even realize that they are doing it. These displays of behavior can be very frightening. Try to remember that these behaviors are probably an indication that the person with AD is very upset about something.

When it looks like he is getting upset, and may seem to be spoiling for a fight, or perhaps using threatening language, you may feel frightened and tempted to fight back. Try to stay calm, use a reassuring tone, and distract the person. Usually, the person with Alzheimer's disease will calm down in a few minutes if you do not bother him.

Taking Care of Yourself—Feeling Cold

Winter is here and one of the common changes people notice while they are aging is that they are more sensitive to cold temperatures. However, even healthy people who are growing older may also experience feeling cold. This is because the blood vessels, which help conserve body heat, are not as elastic as they used to be and their responses to changes in temperature become slower. Feeling cold does not necessarily mean that you need treatment. Sometimes, the best thing to do is to just have a cup of hot tea, put on a warm sweater and a cozy pair of socks. If you have been feeling cold for some time, and bundling up does not seem to help, ask yourself if the unusual feeling is related to other symptoms. For example, have you noticed any changes in weight or any weakness? Do you feel cold all over or is it just your hands and feet? Help your doctor evaluate your symptoms by discussing them with him or her.



Live Life Laughing!

My husband is a light eater—as soon as it is light, he eats.



Inspiration

It is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself, to forgive. Forgive everybody.

— Maya Angelou

Memory Care - Medications

When changes in the environment and the way care is provided have not worked, certain medications may help the person to be more cooperative and comfortable. Medications have side effects and don't work for every person, so be prepared to work with the person's doctor to find the best one.

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SAFETY TIPS—Threatening Behavior with Alzheimer's

Do *not* restrain the person. This could cause serious injury to both of you.

1. Get out of striking distance. Step away so that he cannot reach you.
2. Call for help if you need it. You can call a friend, family member, or neighbor to help you get the person calmed down. If you have to, you can also call 911 or your local emergency number.
3. Try to avoid creating a situation in which the person with AD will feel threatened because this will only make him more upset.

What seems like violent behavior may be the way this person is responding to changes in his brain or to events that he doesn't understand and interprets as dangerous in some way. These might be an unfamiliar person entering the room, attempts to take something away from him, fear of being hurt, an exaggerated response to something happening suddenly, not knowing how to express anger appropriately, or just an effort to avoid complying with a demand.

Source: *The Comfort of Home for Alzheimer's Disease*