



Changed Behaviour – Walking and Movement

Information about dementia for people living in or visiting the residential aged care facility.

People living with dementia often think, act, and behave differently to how they used to.

Changes taking place in the brain can affect the memory of some people and how they find their way.

Some people are restless and may walk for hours without stopping until they are exhausted. Other people walk at unusual times, like at night. People who experience changes in their walking may lose weight, fall over, or get lost and upset others by entering their private space.

What causes this changed behaviour in people?

There is no single answer. People with dementia are often unable to explain what they want or what they are feeling.

They may walk to relieve stress. It may be a sign the person is feeling upset, worried, or frightened, and no longer knows what to do about it.

If a person with dementia exhibits changes in walking or altered movement, it may be because they have a problem, they need help with. This can be things like:

- being in pain
- having constipation, dehydration, or an infection
- a side effect of some medications
- feeling frustrated, anxious, or agitated
- wanting to leave the place they are in
- being tired or having problems sleeping
- needing to use the toilet but not being able to ask for help
- wearing uncomfortable clothing or footwear.

People with changes in walking or movement may also be searching for something, like:

- trying to fill a basic need such as hunger, thirst or being too hot or cold
- looking for a place to feel comfortable
- looking for a family member or loved one, such as a parent, sibling or child
- trying to return to a familiar place, such as their own room or to go home
- doing a task from the past, like going to work or picking up the children.



Caring for someone with walking or movement changes

- Be reassuring and calm.
- Look for reasons in the person's past experiences.
- Some people have always enjoyed walking and want to continue. Make sure they can find a safe way to do this.
- Many people walk most at the same time of day. Support the person and walk with them.
- Offer places to rest during walks.
- Give them other exercises to do as a different activity.
- When they stop, offer food or drinks and other enjoyable activities such as listening to music.

Working together

You, your family and friends are important members of the care team who understand the person living with dementia best.

Work together with staff to share information. This helps to develop a care plan that is centred on the person. Finding out what triggers the person's behaviour can help reduce it.

Talk to staff and ask questions about best dementia care.

Questions to ask staff

- Have you checked for pain, illness, or infection?
- Is there a behaviour support plan in place to help staff when this behaviour occurs?
- Is there a dementia specialist available to be involved in care planning?
- Is there a plan if the person accidentally leaves the building or gets lost?
- Is there a plan if the walking becomes intrusive to others?



Want to know more?

Read the Dementia Australia [wandering factsheet](https://www.dementia.org.au/sites/default/files/helpsheets/Helpsheet-ChangedBehaviours04-Wandering_english.pdf) <https://www.dementia.org.au/sites/default/files/helpsheets/Helpsheet-ChangedBehaviours04-Wandering_english.pdf>.

For expert advice and support contact National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**. The helpline is free, open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

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