



Dementia Can Cause Hallucinations

Dementia causes changes in the brain that may cause someone to hallucinate - see, hear, feel, or taste something that isn't there. Their brain is distorting or misinterpreting the senses. And, even if it's not real, the hallucination is very real to the person experiencing it.

For example, if your loved one is seeing bugs crawling on the floor, nothing you say will convince them that the bugs don't exist. Their brain is saying that the bugs are real. Some hallucinations can be scary, but others might involve visions of ordinary people, situations, or objects from the past. Some may even be pleasant or happy.

These dementia hallucinations usually happen in the middle or late stages and are more common in Lewy Body and Parkinson's dementia. But, they can also happen in Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia.

With any hallucination, what's most important is to validate your older adult's experience, respond to their feelings, and keep them safe.

• **Determine if a response is needed** - The first step is to determine whether the hallucination is bothering your loved one. If the hallucination is upsetting them or causing them to do something unsafe, then it's time to quickly step in to provide comfort or redirect to a safe activity.

• **Stay calm and don't argue or try to convince using logic** - When someone is having a dementia hallucination, it's important to stay calm and avoid contradicting them. What they're seeing is a dementia symptom and is very real to them.

Trying to explain that it isn't real simply won't work because of the damage that dementia has caused in their brain. In fact, knowing that you don't believe them might make them even more upset and agitated. If they're calm

enough to explain, it may also help to understand what they're seeing. Listen carefully and try to pick up clues to what they're seeing.

But, keep in mind that dementia damage in the brain may affect their ability to use the correct words. For example, they could unintentionally say cabbages when they mean green cushions.

• **Validate their feelings and provide reassurance** - Be careful not to dismiss your older adult's experience. Brushing off what they're seeing by saying something like, "Don't be silly there's nothing there," is likely to upset them. It helps to allow them to talk about what they're seeing. Having you take them seriously and provide reassurance increases their feeling of safety and security.

Focus on being kind and responding to their feelings rather than to the hallucination itself. You don't need to pretend that you can see or hear what they can, just be supportive and do what you can to relieve any fear or anxiety as if it was a real threat. For example, you could say, "I don't hear or see anyone outside the window, but you seem worried. What can I do to help you feel safe?"

• **Check the environment and remove possible triggers** - Oftentimes, dementia hallucinations can be triggered by things going on around your loved one. Their dementia brain can interpret sights and sounds differently, causing hallucinations. To remove possible triggers, check their environment for background noise or visual stimulation that could cause a problem. (continued on next page)

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Learn Ways to Stop Judging Yourself as A Caregiver

Caregivers sometimes judge themselves unfairly and focus on the few mistakes you've made rather than on all the good they've done. What you're doing deserves praise, especially from yourself.

The first step in treating yourself more kindly is to notice when you're talking to yourself negatively about caregiving. For example, you might think, "I snapped at Mom again today. I can't even be patient for 5 minutes. I'm the worst daughter in the world." or "Ugh! I forgot to buy more of Dad's oatmeals. I'm so stupid!"

Even though you're noticing when these thoughts happen, it's important not to beat yourself up just for having them. Too often, these thoughts automatically fly through our brains and we hardly notice how harshly we speak to ourselves.

- **Avoid comparing yourself with others** - comparing yourself to other people only makes you feel bad. On top of that, you're usually comparing your worst moments with their best moments - the ones they openly share with

others. Instead, focus on what you're doing right.

- **Look at the big picture** - So what if the house is messy? Who cares if Mom wears PJs all day when she's at home? Does beating yourself up about these details help the situation? Do these things really matter?

Instead of automatically criticizing yourself for not living up to some societal ideal, think about what you truly value.

The house might not be spotless, but maybe it's because you choose to spend quality time chatting and listening to music with Dad to keep him engaged.

Or, may it's worth it to pick your battles with your loved one who has dementia and keep things peaceful whenever possible - by letting the unimportant things go (assuming the situation is not dangerous).

Source: DailyCaring.com

(Dementia Can Cause Hallucinations continued)

- **Offer simple answers and reassurances** - When someone is having a dementia hallucination, don't give long explanations about what's happening. Trying to process what you're saying may add to their distress. Instead, respond in a calm, supportive way.

Gently hugging them or patting their arm or shoulder may also provide the comfort and reassurance they need if they're scared or stressed.

- **Look for patterns** - If hallucinations happen frequently, there could be a trigger that's not obvious. One way to figure out what could be causing the behavior is to track activities and try to find a pattern. Or, it could be something as simple as a change in daily routines that's making them feel confused or disoriented and causing hallucinations.

- **Distract and redirect** - Distract your loved one from their hallucination. Try to switch their focus to an activity they enjoy. You could ask them to help you with a chore that makes them feel successful, look at favorite family photos, sing their favorite song, eat a tasty snack, or take a pleasant stroll to look at the view.

If they're hearing voices, try chatting with them. It's harder to hear those voices if you're now having a conversation with them. Or, if they're seeing someone or something, get to eye level and try to make eye contact with them. If they're occupied with looking at you, it could make the hallucination less intense or even fade away.

Source: Connie Chow, Founder at DailyCaring.com



Central Ohio Chapter

Fairfield County

Alzheimer's
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Have your questions about caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's answered by

Lindsay Blackburn

Alzheimer's Association - Central Ohio Chapter

Linda McDonald, Director of Aging Services, Meals on Wheels of Fairfield County