



# Walking

# Why does it happen?

## **Always Consider First:**

Does the person have an unmet need that they are trying to communicate to you?

## **How the Person's Health Could Contribute to Wanting/Needing to Walk**

- Physical changes in the person's brain could result in the parts of their brain that should regulate their desire to exercise or their perceptions of when they are tired deteriorating or no longer functioning.
- The person's communication skills may have diminished due to their dementia, leaving them unable to say what they need or want and going to look for it themselves.
- The person may have an undiagnosed health condition (physical or mental) that is causing them to express themselves in this way – For example, the person may feel that one of their joints isn't moving freely, and they want to continuously walk to help movement in the joint or through fear that they may lose mobility.
- The person may not be able to explain that they are experiencing the side-effect(s) of medicine(s), which may lead to the person walking away whenever it's time to take medicines.
- The person may have undiagnosed pain that they are trying to alert you to. Do not assume that the person cannot be in pain and want to walk, sometimes walking is a way of alleviating pain.

### **How the Person's Feelings and Emotions Could Contribute to Wanting/Needing to Walk**

- The person will have a purpose, often looking for something or someone - you may not know what or who though. The person may also be walking because they feel they have somewhere they need to be.
- The person may want to exercise in this way because it gives them a sense of vitality, or a sense of choice (over where and when they walk) or a sense of control (being in-charge of their own destination).
- The person may want to walk as a means of seeing new things or getting some fresh air, or indeed any other reason that anyone else might have for walking.

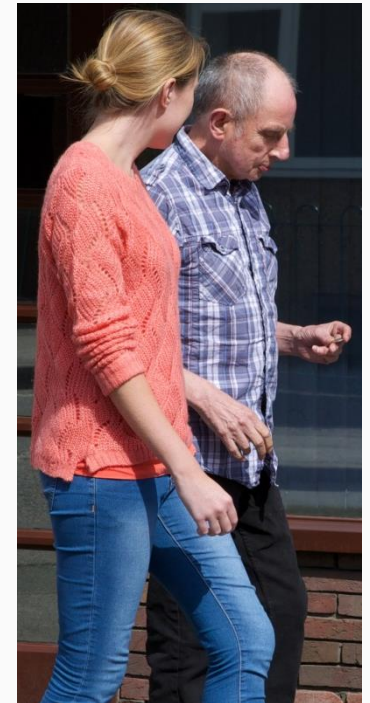


### **How the Person's Feelings and Emotions Could Contribute to Wanting/Needing to Walk**

- The person may be walking to release feelings of frustration – many people with dementia have some insight into their deteriorating cognition, making them feel frustrated at not being able to express themselves as they once did.
- The person may be feeling insecure, confused, angry, upset or bored.
- The person may be walking because they feel frightened or threatened, either in this present moment or because of something that they fear will happen to them imminently. This expression of being frightened or threatened may also come from hallucinations that the person is having, or from memories they are recalling of an earlier part of their life that was distressing for them.
- The combination of the person's learning disability and their dementia may be causing them additional stress, anxiety or uncontrollable emotions that they can only express through walking.

### **How the Person's Daily Life Could Contribute to Wanting/Needing to Walk**

- The person's environment, even if it was previously familiar to them, may now feel hostile due to the person's dementia. For example, the person may be walking to try and remove themselves from a place that is making them feel uncomfortable, or walking to find somewhere.
- The company of a particular individual or individuals, even someone they were once happy to share their time and space with, may now irritate the person due to their dementia affecting their perceptions of that individual. This could lead to the person walking to get away from that person, or walking to find someone else.
- The person may no longer be comfortable with their routine. For example, the person's routine may include a lot of sedentary time when the person may now want/need more opportunities to walk.



# Ways to Support the Person

## Staff Approach

- Help to facilitate the person's walking to support their mobility whenever safely possible. A person who is supported to walk safely is likely to be healthier than a person who is sedentary, so view increased mobility as a positive aspect of the person's life.
- Never view walking as 'wandering' – 'wandering' is a negative term that suggests the person has no purpose in what they are doing, which isn't the case; there is a purpose to them it's just that you don't yet understand that purpose.
- The person may need some time and space to walk independently, which you should safely facilitate for them if possible, ensuring the person is dressed appropriately for the weather and has some form of personal identification on them. Never physically restrict or restrain the person unless they are in immediate danger.

# Ways to Support the Person

## Staff Approach Continued...

- If the person wants to, support them to walk in different places, perhaps by arranging a trip to a place they like to go to, or somewhere they haven't been before (if they want to try something new).
- Be particularly alert if the person is getting tired - they will become more at risk of falling.
- If the person is walking a lot, particularly late in the day/at night, it may be important to find a way to persuade them to take a break, perhaps by engaging them in an occupation/activity or entertainment that they enjoy.
- Be aware that a person who feels compelled to walk may try to leave a place of safety (like their home) to walk in the community unsupported. You will need to have appropriate risk assessments in place.

# Think about Unmet Needs

- Is the person walking to find somewhere or someone? If you think this may be the case, try to find out where or who and if you might be able to help the person with what they are trying to achieve.
- How comfortable is the person? For example, are they happy in their clothing and with their personal appearance, not hungry, thirsty, in need of their medicines, tired, constipated or otherwise unwell? Be aware that the person could be looking to address their own needs, or for someone to help them with an unmet need that they have.
- Does the person have free access to occupation and activity – For example, is the person being supported to engage in their hobbies and interests when they want to, or access new meaningful activities that engage them physically and/or mentally to prevent boredom? Any ways in which you can adapt activities or incorporate walking into activities may be particularly welcome for the person.
- Review how well you are supporting the person with their choice and control – do they have every opportunity they could have to exercise their choice and control, or are they feeling restricted, which is potentially leading to more walking as an expression of a need for independence?

*Ensure the person has access to occupation and activity*





# Understanding the Person's Health Needs

- Ensure the person has access to any walking aids that they need.
- Ensure the person has appropriate, well-fitting footwear and be mindful that with excessive walking the person may need more podiatry treatment to help their feet support their walking.
- Be mindful of any joint problems or undiagnosed pain that may affect the person's walking.
- Rule out any undiagnosed physical or mental health conditions.
- Ensure that the person's eyesight and hearing is checked regularly – this will help the person to walk safely and reduce the risk of falls.
- Review medicines regularly – be particularly mindful of any medicines that may cause drowsiness, which could then lead to falls.
- Review the Treatments module in the Wellbeing for Life toolkit for ideas of non-pharmacological interventions that may help to support the person.

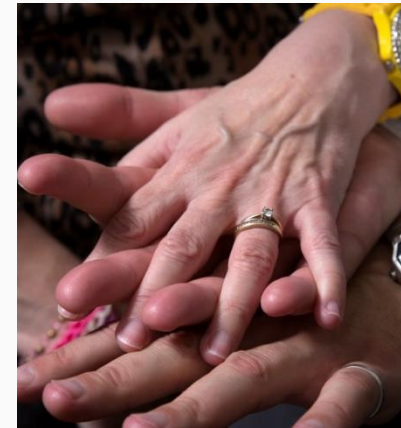


## Changing Daily Life

- Ensure that the person's orientation is supported by having appropriate dementia friendly signage (to help the person navigate their way to the toilet etc) and dementia friendly design in the person's home – For example, a rug on the floor could look like a black hole to a person with dementia, and shiny floors could appear to be water (*See the module on Dementia Friendly Design in the Wellbeing for Life toolkit for more information*).
- If the environment is too hot or too cold, the person may walk to find a cooler or warmer place that makes them feel more comfortable. Likewise the person may walk to get away from a smell or noise that they don't like. Continually review the person's environment, especially during times when the person is a very active walker.
- Consider if the person's routine needs adapting to support their need to walk.
- If appropriate, support the person to eat/drink while they are on the move if this is something they need to do to maintain their food/fluid intake. You may need a variety of finger foods and non-spill cup(s) to support this. Be mindful of the increased risk of choking that walking and eating can create.
- If you have a garden, ensure this is safe so that the person can walk independently outside.

### **Finding Patterns and Problem Solving**

- Understand the person and their history – by researching their life story, you may find clues to explain why they want to walk or find new ideas for places to walk or things to talk about whilst walking with the person.
- Think about every aspect of the person's communication, not just their walking - there may be hints as to any unmet needs the person has from their verbal communication, body language or gestures.





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