



Restlessness

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 Restlessness

- Physical changes in the person's brain could result in the parts of their brain that should regulate their ability to focus on a task or to relax deteriorating or no longer functioning.
- The person may be physically uncomfortable, for example with another health condition or pain (diagnosed or undiagnosed) leading to them feeling restless - For example, sudden and acute restlessness may be attributable to an infection (think particularly about urinary tract infections, or itchy or uncomfortable conditions in the groin area if the person's restlessness involves a lot of fidgeting whilst sat down). Also be mindful that dental pain can cause restlessness and, like all undiagnosed pain, be difficult for the person to communicate to you.

- If the person is incontinent, or has suddenly become incontinent, this could make the person restless, particularly if their pad is an uncomfortable fit, or their pad or clothes are soiled.
- The person may have an undiagnosed mental health condition that is causing them to express themselves in this way.
- The person may not be able to explain that they are experiencing the side-effect(s) of medicine(s).



How the Person's Feelings and Emotions Could Contribute to Restlessness

- The person may be feeling a strong desire to move around, rather than be still and relax, but they may not be able to articulate this.
- The person may be focused or pre-occupied with something that is then causing them to be restless.
- The person may be restless because of a feeling 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 restless 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 person may be feeling embarrassed or stressed – For example in the time before or after personal care.
- 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 restlessness.

How the Person's Daily Life Could Contribute to Restlessness

- 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 not recognise where they are, which may make them feel disorientated and uneasy, or they may be experiencing sensory overload if there is a lot happening around them.
- The company of a particular individual or individuals, even someone they were once happy to share their time and space with, may now cause the person to be uneasy due to their dementia affecting their perceptions of that individual.
- The person may no longer be happy with their routine. For example, the person may become restless when a certain activity is going to be happening.



Ways to Support the Person

Staff Approach

- Facilitate the person to move around as they feel they need to - do not try to stop the person from moving around unless they are in danger.
- Do not chastise the person or demand they relax, this is only likely to make their restlessness worse and heighten any feelings of anxiety that they have.
- Reassure the person in a calm and understanding way, removing anything in the person's personal space that they may feel is making them uneasy.



Think about Unmet Needs

- 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?
- If the person is less mobile, be mindful that if the person has been sitting for too long they may have become uncomfortable, frustrated, bored or distressed because they need the toilet or feel they need to be somewhere.
- 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? An occupation or activity, particularly one that involves movement, might help the person to focus on something other than their restlessness. Also consider tasks that give the person purpose, like regular household activities.
- Equally, does the person have access to relaxation and, if they want to, the opportunity to access the outside world and nature, which may be a calming experience for them?
- If appropriate, try to find the person something to hold or move with their body to help them focus themselves away from their restlessness, or something to engage their hands in other ways, like a rummage box or an activity that involves folding or arranging items/objects.
- Think about the emotional support that the person has, or might need - is there something missing that could lead the person to feel insecure and uneasy?

Understanding the Person's Health Needs

- Rule out any undiagnosed physical or mental health conditions or undiagnosed pain.
- Ensure that the person's dental health, eyesight and hearing is checked regularly.
- Review medicines regularly.
- Review the Treatments module in the Wellbeing for Life toolkit for ideas of non-pharmacological interventions that may help to support the person.

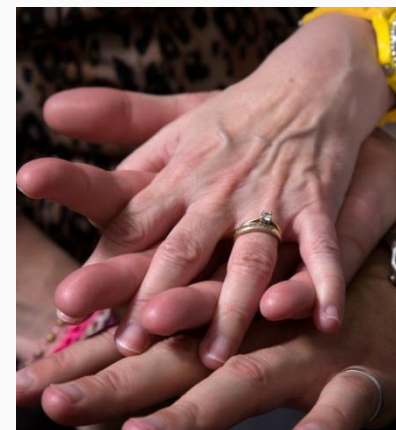


Changing Daily Life

- Consider if the person's environment is appropriate and suitable for their needs. Try moving to a different chair/room/environment to see if different surroundings help to alleviate the person's restlessness.
- If the environment is too hot or too cold, or the person is experiencing sensory overload (or the opposite, a complete lack of stimulation), this may make the person restless.
- If the person's restlessness occurs at night, don't be tempted to rush the person back to bed. Instead create a calm and relaxing ambience that enables the person to feel in control and ready to go back to sleep in their own time. *For more information on supporting a person with changed behaviour at night times, see the factsheet 'Wakefulness and Disturbed Sleeping'.*
- Think about interpersonal relationships - is the person's restlessness associated with a particular member of staff or one of their peers? If you believe it could be, think about supporting the person in a way that minimises the contact that they have with someone who they have a negative association with.
- Conversely, are the times when the person isn't restless associated with being in a particular place or with a particular individual or group? If you believe this is the case, explore what is making that environment/that individual/group comforting for the person, and ways you might be able to replicate those positive circumstances to help minimise future restlessness.
- Consider if the person's routine is contributing to their restlessness, perhaps because they are anticipating something happening. If you identify triggers, consider modifying the person's routine to create as little restless anticipation as possible.

Finding Patterns and Problem Solving

- Think about the circumstances that lead up to the person's restlessness - is there something that you can change in the support you, or colleagues, are providing that could prevent future episodes of restlessness?
- Understand the person and their history, by researching their life story, you may find clues to explain and/or alleviate their restlessness.
- Think about every aspect of the person's communication, not just their restlessness - there may be hints as to any unmet needs the person has from their verbal communication, body language or gestures.





Produced by the MacIntyre Dementia Project with the support of an Innovation, Excellence and Strategic Development Fund Award from the Department of Health.

A special thank you to Beth Britton, and for all her hard work on the MacIntyre Dementia Project.

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