

“It Hurts!”

**Skills for Recognizing Pain
and Caring for Persons with
Dementia Who Have Pain**

Care4U Conference

October 27, 2018

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Alzheimer Society
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What is pain?

- “A complex phenomenon caused by noxious sensory stimuli or neuropathological mechanisms” (R.A. Sternbach, 1974).
- An individual’s memories, expectations, and emotions modify the experience of pain.

Different Types of Pain

- **Nocioceptive (Tissue) Pain**
 - Stimulation of pain receptors
 - Eg. inflammation or injury to the tissue, internal or external
- **Neuropathic (Nerve) Pain**
 - Process involves the nervous system
 - Eg. diabetic neuropathy, phantom limb pain, post stroke pain

Pain is...

- Complex
- Different for each person

AND

- Often under-recognized and under-treated in persons with dementia



Pain is Under-Recognized

- May not have words to communicate pain
- Might use different words for pain
- May misinterpret the feeling of pain
- May not remember the pain
- May not want to complain

Reporting no pain ≠ having no pain

Why is Pain Under-Treated?

- Not recognized
- Not explored
- Seen as a natural part of aging
- Belief that medications will be worse for the person than the pain

What's the Result?

- **Unnecessary suffering**
- Depression, anxiety
- Loss of appetite
- Social withdrawal
- Impaired walking
- Restlessness, sleep problems
- Agitation, aggression

Case Study #1: Viola (72 years old)

- Has Vascular Dementia; several strokes
- Right-sided weakness; communication difficulty
- Does own personal care; home care for bath
- Fond of her home care worker
- Fell yesterday; got up on own
- Didn't sleep well; incontinent
- Won't eat breakfast
- Hit home care worker during bath



Pain Assessment

- Pain is subjective
- Self-report.... ASK!
- If self-report is not available, observe the person



Recognizing Pain

- Facial expression
- Body movement and Function
- Vocalization
- Breathing
- Consolability



PAINAD: Warden, Hurley, & Volicer (2003)

Changes in Facial Expression

- Inexpressive
- Sad
- Frightened
- Frown
- Grimacing



Changes in Body Language

- Tense, distressed, pacing, fidgeting
- Rigid, fists clenched, knees pulled up, pulling or pushing away, striking out



Changes in Function

- Activities of daily living
- Appetite
- Sleep patterns
- Activity and usual routines



Changes in Vocalization

- Occasional moan or groan
- Low level speech, negative quality
- Repeated troubled calling out
- Loud moaning, groaning or crying



Changes in Breathing

- Occasional or continuously labored breathing
- Hyperventilation
- Brief periods of stopping breathing



Consolability

- Distracted or reassured by voice or touch
- Unable to console, distract, or reassure



Pain Journal

- Where is the pain?
- How does it feel?
- What was the person doing when it started?
- Non-drug strategies used?
- Medications taken?
- How was the pain an hour later?
- Other comments?

Non-Drug Strategies

Physical

- Massage
- Cold
- Heat
- Positioning

Psychological

- Distraction
- Relaxation
- Music
- Controlled breathing

Massage

- Light pressure
- Varying levels of comfort with this
- Not over fragile skin, bony areas, or open sores
- Not if circulation problems in legs



Cold

- Place on or near area
- Numbs nerve endings, reduces spasms and swelling
- Gel packs or cold cloths
- Layer of cloth on skin
- Apply gradually
- Can alternate with heat



Heat

- Relaxes muscles, reduces muscle spasms, decreases sensitivity to pain
- Place at or near area
- Moist compresses or heat packs
- Do not put over medication patches
- Don't use products containing menthol when using heat
- Don't use on recent injury

Positioning

- Comfortable positions
- Use pillows or rolled blankets



Distraction

- To draw a person's attention away
- Decreases pain, increases relaxation
- May cause other people to doubt that the individual has pain or its severity



Relaxation

- Free from anxiety and muscle tension.
- Loosens tense muscles, distracts person from pain, decreases stress, and helps to cope



Music

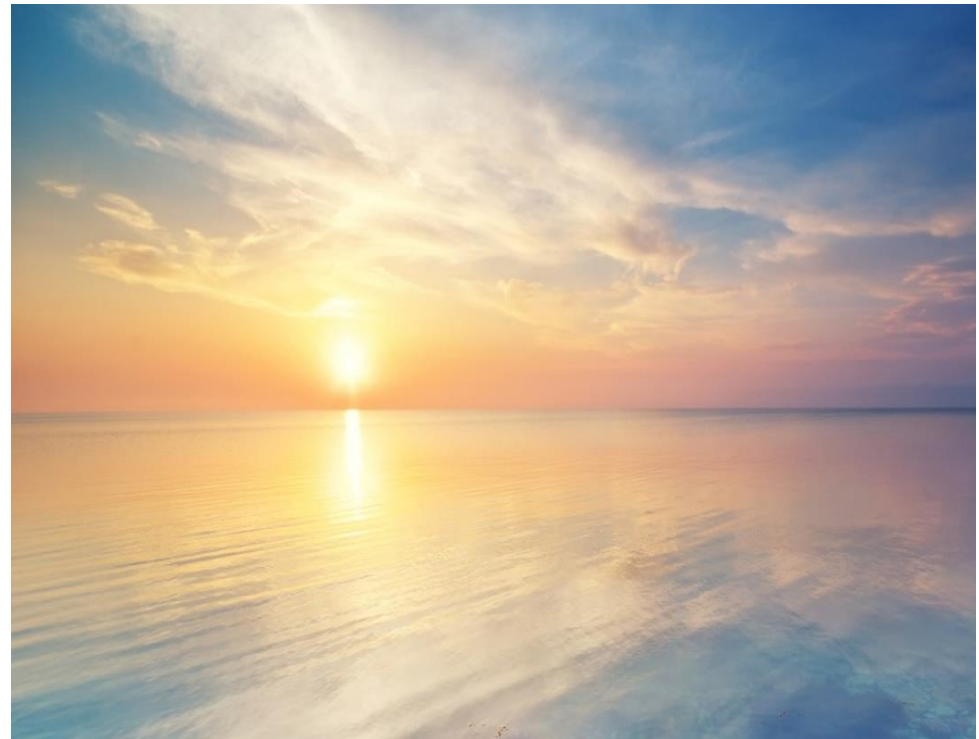
- Can relax and distract
- Music should be personalized
- Research has shown that listening to meaningful music decreases pain

(Dan Cohen, 2017)



Controlled breathing

- Reduces stress that can cause muscle tension and increase pain
- Lead the individual through deep breathing and imagery.



Medications

- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist
- Every person's situation is different



Medications

- Regular dosing of acetaminophen
- Opioids
- Antidepressants
- Seizure medications
- Ointments
- Patches

Medications

- Start low and go slow
 - Medications not processed as well as people age
- Medication Review



Cannabis

- Long term use associated with memory problems
- May help manage behavioural symptoms, but only in some cases
- Alzheimer Society has funded research
- *Currently no evidence* that it is useful for treatment or prevention of Alzheimer Disease
- More research needed

Tips for Taking Medications

- Notes
- Alarms
- Storage
- Phone calls
- Neighbours
- Pill boxes
- Blister packs
- Dispensers

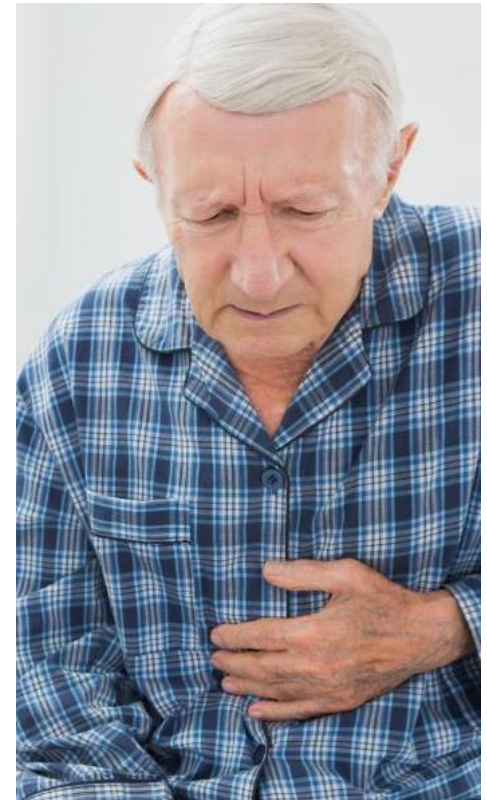


Tips for Giving Medications

- Calm environment
- Give them time
- Let them participate
- Timing of medication
- Form of medication
- Medication Review
- Side effects
- Triggers
- Caregiver take own medications at same time
- Wait and try again
- Revise plan
- Establish a routine
- Share the process

Case Study #2: Sam (87 years old)

- Mixed dementia, arthritis, heart failure
- Wife cues him for personal care, escorts him to meals
- Lately abrupt and disagreeable
- Washroom more frequently
- Breathes hard, frowns, pushes wife away, yells





Dave Waters

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“He was suffering deeply and his pain was an important contributing factor. At the end of the day, its about alleviating the suffering— its about comfort. I wish that pain had been considered sooner as a factor for his increase in responsive behaviour. His suffering was inhumane and definitely not necessary.”

Conclusion

- Pain assessment in persons with dementia can be challenging
- Self-report is the gold standard therefore
ASK
- Observe behaviours
- Search for potential causes of pain
- Treat the pain



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