

Agitation and Restlessness

Agitation is a commonly occurring symptom in someone nearing the end of life, yet it often surprises the caregiver and family when it occurs. A loved one who is usually calm may unexpectedly and suddenly experience significant mood and behavior changes. As with other symptoms, it is important to recognize and treat agitation early.

Signs and Symptoms of Agitation

- Restlessness and inability to be still
- Thrashing
- Anger
- Insomnia
- Yelling and/or striking out
- Picking at clothing or bedding
- Confusion and/or paranoia
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing attention
- Trying to get out of bed
- Frequent requests to urinate
- Hallucinating
- Experiencing a need to go somewhere, such as work or the store

What You Can Do to Help

- Stay calm. If you appear anxious, it could affect your loved one's behavior.
- Call the Empath Health nurse. He or she will evaluate the patient for possible causes of agitation and work with you and the hospice team to treat the agitation.
- Administer prescribed anxiety medications according to directions, if they are available.
- Stay with your loved one to help keep them safe.
- Talk soothingly to your loved one.
- Create a calm and soothing environment. This can include reducing excess noise, dimming lights or playing music softly.
- Use lotion to gently stroke your loved one's hand or foot.
- Do not correct or contradict what your loved one says; it may increase their agitation.

Notes to Discuss With the Nurse

The following information will be very helpful to the Empath Health nurse.

When the agitation began _____

What, if anything, triggered the agitation _____

The last time your loved one:

- Urinated _____
- Had a bowel movement _____
- Took regularly scheduled medications _____
- Had any food and fluid _____

Call Empath Health with any questions (888) 855-2838: _____

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