

Managing Changes: Perception, Balance and Mobility

Also available in Punjabi | ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਵੀ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਹੈ

This is a resource for the South Asian community. It was developed together with caregivers of people living with dementia within the South Asian community in Canada. A caregiver could be a family member, friend, or another person who is supporting a person living with dementia.

This resource provides information about:



Common changes with perception, balance, and mobility, and related strategies for people living with dementia and caregivers



Occupational therapy



Changes with perception

Dementia can affect a person’s sensory perception, meaning that their brain may have difficulty making sense of what they see. Dementia can also affect other senses, such as touch, hearing, and smell. There are strategies that can help.

What you might notice:

Difficulty distinguishing an object from its background. For example, seeing a white shirt laid out on a white bed sheet

Difficulty understanding shadows, glares, reflections or patterns

Strategies for people living with dementia and caregivers:

- Book regular vision tests, and ensure glasses are worn if needed.
- Use contrasting colours to help objects stand out from backgrounds. For example, bright plates so food stands out, a dark seat on a white toilet, coloured edges on doorways to avoid bumping into them, and on stairs to avoid tripping.
- **Avoid** dramatic colour changes in flooring. For example, a dark mat on a white floor can look like a hole.

- Ensure rooms have bright, even lighting. Close curtains and turn on lights in the early evening to reduce confusing shadows.
- Use night lights.
- Remove or cover mirrors if reflections become confusing.
- **Avoid** patterns on flooring. For example, swirly carpet patterns can disturb balance.

What you might notice:

Seeing, hearing or smelling something that is not there. For example, thinking a clothing rack in a dark room is a person, hearing voices, or smelling smoke

Strategies for people living with dementia and caregivers:

- Book regular hearing and vision tests and ensure hearing aids and glasses are worn if needed.
- Visit your family doctor to rule out medical causes, such as infection, or medication side effects.
- Check for things in your home that may be misperceived. For example, removing a clothing rack that looks like a person in the dark.
- Caregivers can offer reassurance and comfort if the person living with dementia is upset. Try to direct the person to a new location, or a more pleasant topic or activity.
- Caregivers should **avoid** correcting or arguing. The way a person living with dementia sees or understands a situation might be different from the way you do.

“My mother-in-law did not recognize her reflection in the entryway mirror and thought it was an old woman. She kept asking if she was still there. I went back to the mirror and told my mother-in-law that she had gone home, to avoid correcting her. We decided to cover the mirror with curtains to avoid confusion.”

-Caregiver from the South Asian community

What you might notice:

Strategies for people living with dementia and caregivers:

Sensitivity to noise

- Reduce unnecessary noises and distractions, such as the television or loud music.
- Ensure hearing aids are worn correctly, cleaned and maintained to avoid disruptive feedback.
- Choose quieter times to visit busy places, such as restaurants or malls.
- Use ear plugs to reduce noises.
- Take breaks when needed. For example, find a quiet room at an event.

Changes in sensitivity to touch and temperature

- Be aware of safety issues, such as not noticing the temperature of food or drinks, the stove, shower or bath, or the outdoor air. Make changes as needed, such as cooking together, adjusting the temperature of the water heater, and putting away clothes that are not appropriate for the season.

Changes with balance and mobility

Dementia can also impact balance and mobility. There are strategies that can help.

What you might notice:	Strategies for people living with dementia and caregivers:
<p>Changes with walking patterns and risk of falls</p>	<p>Consult with an occupational therapist about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supportive, non-slip shoes ● Mobility aids, such as walkers or canes ● Tripping hazards in your home, such as clutter, rugs, and cords ● Slip resistant mats in the shower or bath ● Stair rails ● Personal alarm systems
<p>Difficulty transferring between sitting, standing and lying down</p>	<p>Consult with an occupational therapist about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grab bars for the shower and toilet ● Shower seats, and raised toilet seats ● Beds with adjustable height settings

Supports and services

Occupational therapy is delivered by occupational therapists who help people manage their everyday activities. Occupational therapists can help with mobility equipment and home modifications to make it easier and safer for a person living with dementia to complete tasks. **Ask your family doctor about a referral.**



Notes

Use this space to write down any notes, reflections, or questions you have about this resource.