

Understanding Agitation

- End of life agitation can be referred to by different names:
 - Delirium
 - Restlessness
 - Confusion
- Agitation is a common symptom during the last hours to days of life.
 - Agitation is not always severe, and most of the time the symptoms are mild.
- The hospice team can help with all factors of agitation:
 - Physical: the hospice nurse and hospice physician will work together to come up with a plan to make sure the agitation is managed effectively.
 - Spiritual: the hospice chaplain will help support by exploring individual spirituality needs.
 - Psychological: the hospice social worker will help support loved ones.
 - Social: the whole hospice team will look at interventions that can help maintain as much comfort as possible.

Understanding Agitation & Signs of Agitation

- Agitation can be due to many different factors at end of life:
 - Needing to urinate
 - Having constipation
 - Having uncontrolled pain
 - Needing spiritual support
 - Normal body changes the last hours to days of life.
- If agitation is present constantly and it is not mild, most likely medications will be recommended by your hospice team.
 - Medications for consistent agitation are more effective when given on a scheduled basis.
- Signs of agitation when someone cannot verbalize needs:
 - Hallucinations
 - Fidgeting
 - Irritability
 - Inability to sleep or relax
 - Wandering
 - Worsening confusion that is not managed with redirection.

If symptoms are not managed or you have any questions, please contact your Confluence Health Home Care Services Hospice Team: (509) 433-3700

Interventions to Reduce Agitation & When to Contact Hospice

□ Interventions:

- Take or give medications for agitation as prescribed.
- Create a calm and supportive environment without loud noises.
- Do not leave someone who is agitated alone to keep them safe.
- Allow the full hospice team, including the social worker and spiritual counselor, to provide support for physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

□ When to contact hospice:

- There are new or worsening signs of agitation.
- Agitation is interfering with quality of life.
- Agitation is interfering with comfort and sleep.
- There are questions about medications.
- Agitation is not controlled with current interventions.
- There has been no urine output for over eight hours.
- There has been no bowel movement for over three days or there is a feeling of constipation.

Some Common Agitation Medications & Side Effects

□ Some common medications:

- Haloperidol
- Seroquel
- Zyprexa
- Risperidone
- Lorazepam

□ Some common side effects:

- Tiredness
- Increased sleeping
 - Agitation usually happens during the last hours to days of life and the body is trying to sleep but the agitation is not allowing rest.
- Dry mouth
 - The hospice team can provide mouth moisturizer to help.
- Unsteadiness
 - When agitation is present, there should always be someone present to help with walking, transferring, or moving in bed to avoid falls and injuries.

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Other Information on Agitation & Medications

- Withholding agitation medications at end of life when they are needed can cause unnecessary suffering, distress, and more agitation.
- If agitation is constant, agitation medications are best given on a scheduled basis, even if someone is sleeping most of the time.
- It is more difficult when agitation gets out of control to get comfort with agitation medications. Always contact your hospice team at the first signs of agitation.

Agitation During the Final Hours to Days of Life

- Agitation can be a normal part of the end-of-life process.
- If agitation medications were needed before the final hours to days of life, these medications should be continued, even if someone is unresponsive.
- Sometimes agitation medications may need to be increased during the last hours to days due to disease progression.
- The hospice team will provide guidance on non-medication strategies to help manage agitation.
- Hospice will teach you how to give medications, when to give the medications, and how to tell if someone is needing medications.

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