

Relieving Symptoms of Advanced Illness

Anxiety

Because of the many physical and emotional changes associated with serious illness, feelings of nervousness or anxiety may occur. This is a normal response when things feel uncertain or beyond your control.

Although anxiety is natural, being nervous is uncomfortable and can affect the quality of your life. Identifying the causes of anxiety will help to determine what to do about it. However, it is possible to feel anxious without being able to say why. Please talk with your Agrace team if you are experiencing any of the symptoms shown below and want help finding relief.

Signs and symptoms:

Your body has many different ways of showing anxiety. Knowing that you may be nervous is the first step to feeling better. Common symptoms of anxiety include these:

- Restlessness or not being able to relax
- Irritability
- Butterflies in the stomach and/or feeling like there is a lump in your throat
- Muscle tension, aches, soreness or feeling tense
- Feeling very tired or exhausted
- Trouble falling or staying asleep or having nightmares
- Getting upset about things that normally would not upset you
- Worrying about what could or may happen
- Sweating or flushing
- Dry mouth
- Diarrhea
- Urinary frequency
- Trouble concentrating or feeling overwhelmed
- Headaches
- Sweating or cold, clammy hands, heart palpitations and/or rapid breathing
- Panic or extreme nervousness, feeling something needs to be done but feeling unable to do anything
- Increase in pain

What can help relieve feelings of anxiety?

While feelings of anxiety are normal, it is important to decrease the effect of these feelings. The symptoms of anxiety are your body's way of letting you know it needs to relax. Here are some suggestions to reduce anxiety:

- Talk about your feelings, fears and concerns with someone who will listen and provide support, including family members, friends, doctor, clergy and/or your Agrace team.
- Take slow, deep breaths.
- Enjoy a relaxing activity, such as taking a hot bath, coloring or reading a good book.
- Take a short walk or find a place where you can relax, uninterrupted, for a while.
- Allow yourself to cry.
- Keep a journal and write about your fears, feelings, concerns and/or things that are happening in your life.
- Listen to soothing music.

Notify your Agrace team anytime you have questions or concerns about anxiety.



Confusion

Confusion is a mental clouding with less awareness of one's environment, including uncertainty about time, place and person. It can be a sudden change in mental status, often occurring over a period of hours to days, and it can even change throughout the day.

Signs and symptoms:

- Reversal of sleep and awake cycles
- "Sundowning" or confusion that is worse at night
- Mood swings that may change over the course of a day
- Difficulty focusing attention or shifting attention
- Hallucinations or seeing, hearing or feeling things that are not there
- Agitation and irritability
- Drowsiness and sluggishness
- Disorientation
- An unawareness of surroundings

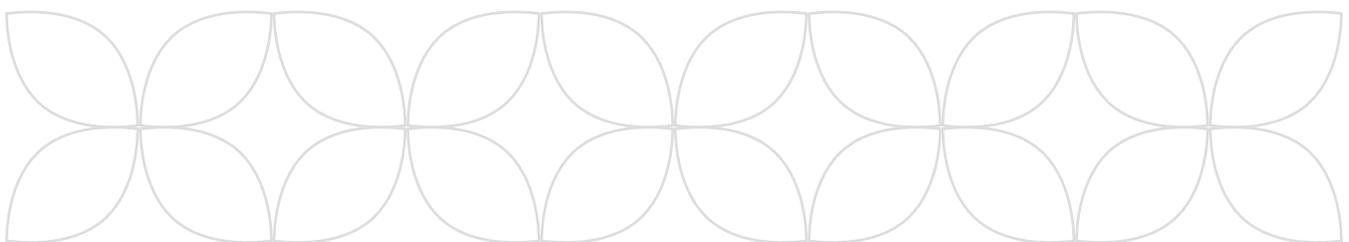
What can help address and reduce confusion?

Confusion is common at the end of life. It has many causes. Your Agrace team will try to find out what is causing the confusion, and they will discuss treatment options with you.

Here are a few things caregivers can do to help:

- Keep the patient safe.
- Remind the patient who you are when you assist with caregiving. Tell them what you are going to do. For example, "I am going to help you get out of bed now."
- Try to maintain a routine and structure.
- Avoid asking the patient a lot of questions.
- Provide a quiet, peaceful setting without TV and loud noises.
- Play the patient's favorite music.
- Keep a nightlight on at night.
- If the patient is starting a new medication, watch for improvement, worsening or side effects, and report to your Agrace team.

Notify your Agrace team anytime you have questions or concerns about confusion.





Restlessness

The last days and hours of life can be a time of peace and comfort. However, some people experience restlessness in the days or hours prior to death.

Signs and symptoms:

Prior to death, the patient may become agitated or confused and have other signs of restlessness:

- Making faces, clenching teeth
- Pulling or picking at bed linens
- Attempting to remove clothing
- Sleeping very little
- Constantly moving in bed or trying to get out of bed
- Crying out, moaning

It is not always possible to determine why restlessness occurs. Sometimes it is simply a part of the dying process, but sometimes there is an underlying cause that can be treated. Your Agrace team will look for possible causes and treat as appropriate. Some causes of restlessness:

- Pain
- Constipation
- Inability to urinate
- Lack of oxygen or shortness of breath
- Fear
- Infection (urinary or pneumonia)
- Low blood sugar
- Medication side effects

What can caregivers do to help address restlessness?

Caring for a person with restlessness can make you feel tired, overwhelmed and frustrated. Call your Agrace team immediately if the patient shows any signs of restlessness. The team can work with you and your doctor to find treatments to help decrease the restlessness. Caregivers can also:

- Keep the patient safe by padding their sides with pillows or placing pillows against the bedside rails.
- Provide constant supervision. Ask family, friends and the Agrace team to help.
- Keep the room as peaceful and quiet as possible.
- Gently reassure the patient and give them time to talk about any worries.
- Turn down bright lights.
- Try playing soft, soothing music.
- Explain to visitors the need for quiet, soothing surroundings.
- Talk in a calm, quiet voice. When giving care, softly explain what you are doing.
- Take time for yourself. Ask someone to stay with the patient while you rest, go for a walk, run an errand or do an activity you enjoy.
- Look for underlying causes—has anything changed in the patient's environment?
- Help the patient change positions (such as from sitting to lying down).
- Change location/environment, if possible (help patient to a different room, open a window, people watch).

Notify your Agrace team anytime you have questions or concerns about restlessness.