

# Managing Apathy in Dementia



The Geriatric Medicine service provides inpatient and outpatient specialist care to older persons aged 75 years and above. Specialist assessment and individualised holistic management are offered to elderly with bladder and bowel-control problems, memory, mood and behavioural problems and multiple falls or difficulty walking. Patients are cared for by a multi-disciplinary team comprising doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, dietitians, pharmacists, podiatrists and medical social workers, where necessary.

# What is Apathy?

Apathy is a symptom of dementia and occurs when a person loses interest in things around them. Over time, this indifference adds burden to the caregiver.

## Signs of Apathy

- Difficulty starting and completing a task
- Lack of emotional response to good and bad events
- Little interest or energy
- Does not share new ideas or show curiosity in things around them
- Indifferent to others' feelings or interest

Apathy can get in the way of everyday activities and make life less enjoyable.



# Reasons for Apathetic Behaviour

- Disease progression of dementia or changes in brain matter
- Unable to remember and perform complex functions
- Depression

## Examples:

- Lack of motivation in previously enjoyed activities
- Lack of interest in self-care, personal grooming, hygiene needs; indifference to surroundings, family, friends and carers
- Unresponsive to care and concern shown by family, friends and carers

# Common Myths Associated with Apathy

- **Myth 1:** She stopped doing all the housework. Isn't she lazy?
- **Facts:** Scientists discovered that apathy occurs because of problems in the brain's motivation pathways.

In about 100 people diagnosed with Alzheimer's, about 70 develop apathy as a symptom. At times, apathy occurs before memory problems do.

- **Myth 2:** He just sits there and does nothing. Is he depressed?
- **Facts:** Apathy may look like depression. But it is different.

### **People with depression:**

- Are usually sad
- Feel a sense of guilt, hopelessness, worthlessness, and sometimes want to die

### **People with apathy:**

- Do not care about what is happening around them
- Can feel happiness or joy during an activity

## **Ways for Caregivers to Cope with Apathy**

- **Set up a daily routine** with schedule, calendar and reminders. A person with apathy finds it easier to start an activity when it becomes a habit.
- **Break tasks down into smaller, doable steps**
- **Use alternate ways to suggest activities**, e.g. instead of asking, “Do you want to go for a walk?” say, “It’s time for our afternoon walk” and help them to wear their shoes.



- **Do not use force**

Try not to do something against your loved one's will. It may upset the both of you.

- **Interest your loved one in activities that he or she is still capable of doing and has enjoyed in the past** e.g. dining with family at restaurant, music/songs, movies, dance, games, pets and visits from grandchildren.

- **Ask your loved one for "help" in completing tasks** such as dusting, watering plants, washing rice, preparing ingredients, folding clothes, sorting out beans.

- **Participate in activities together** to motivate them.



- **Be selective of activities**

If he or she refuses to participate, suggest activities that do not require much effort, e.g. listening to music or reading.

- **Praises or rewards**

Provide frequent and appropriate praises or rewards to instil a sense of well-being for a boost in self-esteem.

- **Day care centres**

Consider enrolling your loved one in day care centres where he or she may be more willing to open up in group activities and peer interaction.

- **Seek medical help**

Ensure that your loved one is not suffering from depression. Depression can be treated.



## For more information

### Ng Teng Fong General Hospital and Jurong Community Hospital

1 Jurong East St 21, Singapore 609606

[www.ntfgh.com.sg](http://www.ntfgh.com.sg) | [www.jch.com.sg](http://www.jch.com.sg)

### Clinic opening hours

Monday – Friday: 8.30am – 5.30pm

Saturday: 8.30am – 12.30pm (Selected clinics only\*)

Dental Clinic: Monday – Thursday: 8.00am – 5.30pm, Friday: 8.00am – 5.00pm

\*Please refer to our websites for more details.

### General enquiries & appointments

General enquiries line: 6908 2222 (24-hr)

Fax: 6716 5500 | Email: [contactus@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:contactus@nuhs.edu.sg)

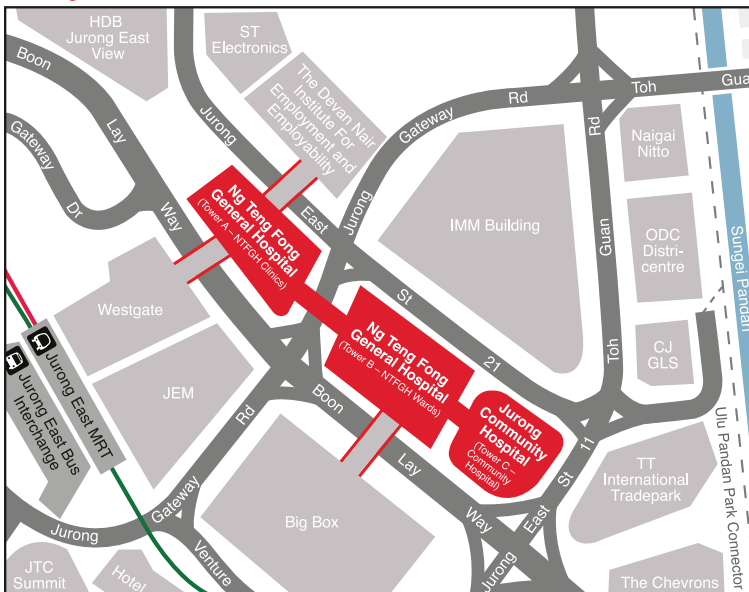
Appointment line: 6908 2222 (Monday – Friday: 8.00am – 5.30pm, Saturday: 8.00am – 12.30pm)

Fax: 6716 2200 | Email: [appointment@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:appointment@nuhs.edu.sg)

Dental appointment line: 6716 2233 (Monday – Friday: 8.00am – 5.30pm)

Fax: 6716 2200 | Email: [JHCampus\\_Dental@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:JHCampus_Dental@nuhs.edu.sg)

## Getting there



### By train

Alight at Jurong East MRT Station

### By bus

#### Jurong East Bus Interchange

41, 49, 51, 52, 66, 66B, 78, 78A, 79, 79A, 97, 97E, 98, 98M, 105, 143, 143M, 160, 160A, 160M, 183, 183B, 197, 333, 334, 335, 506

#### Along Boon Lay Way

49, 99, 333, Private bus service 625, 990

### Disclaimer:

The information in this brochure is meant for educational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. Please seek your doctor's advice before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition. Information is accurate at the time of printing.