

Managing Repetitive Behaviour 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 Repetitive Behaviour in Dementia?

Repetitive behaviour is the act of repeating a sound, word, question, or an action e.g. tapping of fingers continually.

The person is restless, paces around the room, dresses or undresses himself or herself repeatedly.

Possible Causes of Repetitive Behaviours

- **Memory Loss**

As the disease progresses, people with dementia lose the ability to remember what they have just said or done.

- **Unable to understand what is happening**

Even the simplest, everyday chores become unfamiliar to the person, causing them to repeatedly question what is going on.



- **Unable to understand a need or express an emotion (e.g. fear or anger)**

Hunger may be expressed by repeatedly asking, “What’s for lunch?”, while discomfort from being in a warm environment may be expressed by pulling on one’s shirt. The person may be feeling fearful or confused.

- **Frustration in communication and loss of control**

Such behaviour is expressed when the person is trying to communicate but feels he/she is not being listened to or cannot get the message across.

- **Stress and anxiety caused by environment or separation from a loved one**

This happens when the person is unable to interpret sights and sounds or remember what has just happened, e.g. where a loved one has gone.

- **Boredom or under-stimulation**

The person may be bored and is using repetitive behaviours to relieve it.

- **Side effects of medication**

Sometimes the cause of repetitive behaviours is a side effect from medication.

Coping Strategies

- **Stay calm**

Do not take such behaviour personally. Speak to the person calmly, maintain eye contact, while providing a comforting touch. Reassure them that you understand their need for emotion. Do not point the person out as it may trigger agitation or anger. Decide if change is needed or it can be ignored.

- **Eliminate triggers**

Identify the pattern and avoid situations that cause such behaviour.

- **Change the environment**

Control stimulus and ensure safety for the activity, e.g. cushion the table top if the person has a tendency to tap his/her fingers until a bruise forms.

- **Memory aids**

Use notes, signs, pictures, a large clock or calendar to orientate or remind them.

- **Write down answers to repeatedly-asked questions**

- **Identify ways to cope with scenarios**

This is useful when the caregiver is away. You can play an audiotape or videotape of the caregiver speaking or giving instructions.



- **Distract or redirect**

Use snacks/drinks or another activity to contain the situation.

- **Keep to a consistent routine**

- **Provide structured activities**

Recreational activities such as soothing music, singing, outdoor walks, exercise or a meaningful and pleasant activities like folding the laundry or sorting out coins can help to distract.

- **Review medication**

Check if the medications are causing repetitive behaviours.



Remember...

- Repetitive actions are rarely harmful.
- Repetition can be stressful to the caregiver.
- It is the disease that causes the behaviour and not the person.

Notes:

For more information

Ng Teng Fong General Hospital and Jurong Community Hospital

1 Jurong East St 21, Singapore 609606

www.ntfgh.com.sg | 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

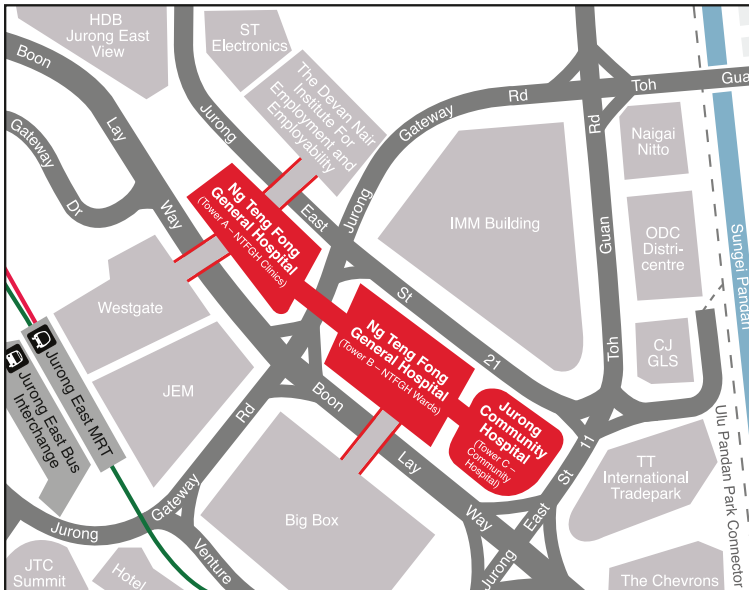
Appointment line: 6908 2222 (Monday – Friday: 8.00am – 5.30pm, Saturday: 8.00am – 12.30pm)

Fax: 6716 2200 | Email: appointment@nuhs.edu.sg

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

Fax: 6716 2200 | Email: 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

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