



Care Partner Information

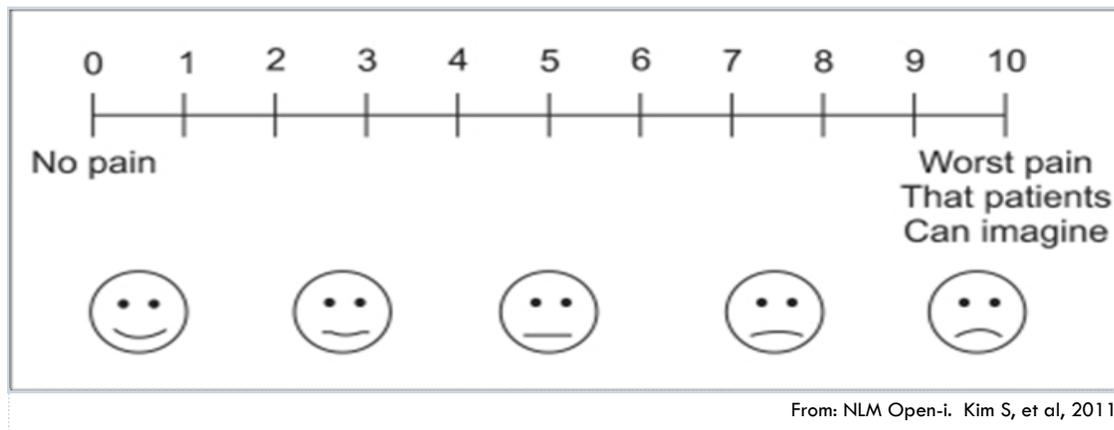
Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Assessing Pain in Dementia

People with dementia can experience pain, just like anyone else. But, they often react to pain differently than others. There are several reasons for this. One is that people with advanced dementia aren't able to tell you they hurt. Or, they might feel bad, but don't understand what they are feeling. So, you can't count on them to tell someone if they hurt, or what hurts.

Pain in Early Dementia

In the early stages of dementia, you can usually just ask the person and they will tell you what hurts. You often can ask them to tell you how bad it hurts by using the smiley faces scale shown below.



Pain in More Advanced Dementia

As dementia gets worse, you will need to use different ways to find out if they are having pain. You will need to watch them and listen to them. Signs of pain include crying, moaning, or yelling for no reason, or being "difficult." People's faces may also look pained, like frowning or clenching their teeth. Or they might just roll around in bed and moan. Any of those things can be a sign that a person is having pain.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

How to Tell if a Person With Dementia is Having Pain

The table below lists things or “signs” that can be used to tell if a person with dementia is having pain, but you must watch the person’s behavior. The staff in nursing homes and hospitals use these signs all the time. You can also use them at home or anywhere else.

Signs of Pain in People with Advanced Dementia	
<i>Behavior</i>	<i>What to Look For</i>
Breathing	If breathing is heavy or noisy, it is more likely that pain is present.
Whimpering, Moaning or Crying	The louder and more often there is whimpering, moaning, or crying, the more likely the person has severe pain.
Facial expression	A sad or frowning face can mean mild pain. Clenched teeth, eyes squeezed shut, or twisted mouth often means severe pain.
Body language	People with severe pain will often be rigid, with fists clenched and knees pulled up. They may also lay in bed rocking. Or, they may push or hit people.
Comforting	Can you comfort the person to make them feel better? If not, it’s more likely that they are having pain.
Eating	Sometimes people in pain, especially stomach pain, refuse to eat.

Some info in this table is from Warden, 2003 and Abbey, 2004.

You can use the behaviors in the table above to help decide if someone has pain. You can also use it after giving someone medicine to treat pain. If the pain behaviors get better after taking pain medicine, the pain is probably getting better.

Finally, if you are providing care for someone and they frequently show the behaviors above, you should tell the doctor or nurse who provides their medical care.

Useful Websites

[“Pain Assessment in Advanced Dementia Scale”](#)

A [video](#) about cues to detecting pain in people with dementia

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Alzheimer’s disease and Related Dementia ~ Care Partner Information

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