



Terminal Agitation

Terminal agitation, also referred to as terminal restlessness, is a common symptom in dying patients. Sometimes those who are usually calm can suddenly and unexpectedly become agitated, restless, and confused. Family members may also notice a rapid change in personality as some may become angry, making irrational accusations and demands. While the cause for this sudden change isn't completely understood, it is important to remember that it does not indicate a true change in the patient's feelings about their family or caregiver. Terminal agitation is typically seen during the hours or days before death and can be distressing and overwhelming for caregivers.

Signs of Terminal Agitation

Physical Signs:

- Constant motion such as:
 - Tossing and turning
 - Trying to get out of bed
 - Pulling at clothing and blankets
 - Fidgeting
 - Pacing
- Striking out by hitting or kicking
- Yelling out
- Muscle twitching

Behavioral Signs:

- Increased confusion
- Inability to concentrate or follow conversations
- Irritability
- Mumbling, incoherent speech
- Hallucinations

Questions or concerns?

Call a hospice nurse at 513-891-7700. For caregiving tips visit www.HospiceofCincinnati.org/for-the-caregiver.



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Managing Terminal Agitation

What you can do

- Manage pain and other symptoms that may cause restlessness and/or irritability
- Keep track of urination and bowel movements—a full bladder or bowel may cause pain and restlessness
- Maintain a safe environment and minimize risk of falling
 - Keep the bed low and consider side rails
 - Keep items close to eliminate reaching for items too far away and falling
 - Remove clutter and obstacles
 - Use non-skid floor rugs
 - Consider bed alarm or room monitor

Other helpful measures

- Create a calm and peaceful atmosphere
 - Play soft music, lower the lights
 - Speak quietly
 - Avoid sudden, loud noises
 - Play their favorite music or sounds
- Keep a night light on in the room to help orient them in darkness
- Place pictures and familiar objects in view to comfort them
- Offer support such as “I am right here with you.”
- Do not argue with their “reality” or confusion, it may agitate them further

Your HOC Nurse will provide training about medications that are specific to managing terminal agitation. It is important to give these medications as instructed. Please keep in touch with your hospice nurse for continued guidance.

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