



Repetitive behaviour is a common symptom of dementia. A person with dementia may repeat a sound, a word, a question, or an action. They may also become restless and pace around the room. The person with dementia likely has no insight or control over this behaviour. If you have noticed repetitive behaviours, you may be wondering:

What causes repetition?

- **Memory Loss.** For example, the person may forget the action they just did.
- **Confusion.** For example, the person may feel lost and repeatedly ask to go home.
- **Inability to understand a need or emotion.** For example, hunger might be expressed by repeatedly asking, “What’s for lunch?”
- **Frustration.** The person might be trying to communicate but feels unheard.
- **Stress and anxiety.** When things are uncertain, repetition tends to get worse. For example, the person may repeatedly check their purse before an appointment.
- **Boredom.** The person may be trying to fill the day.
- **Side effects of medicine.** For example, sticking their tongue in and out can be caused by certain medicines. Let the doctor know if you notice repetitive movements.

How can I help reduce the behaviours?

The first step is to ask yourself if the behaviour is causing harm. If not, it is possible to ignore the behaviour. But try not to ignore the person. Repetitive behaviours are often a sign of an underlying emotion.

Understanding why the behaviour is happening is the key to coping. There are many ways to approach challenging behaviours. For tips, read the **Understanding Behavior Changes** fact sheet, available [Here](#).

Other strategies include:

- Keeping routines consistent to reduce uncertainty.
- Hiding triggers. Avoid objects or activities that tend to trigger the person's repetitive behaviour.
- Write it down. If the person asks the same questions every day, try posting notes around the home. For example, "Dinner is at 6 p.m." and "Your slippers are in the closet". Use picture cards if the person has lost the ability to read.

What if these strategies are not working?

It is not always clear what causes repetitive behaviours. Sometimes, we cannot remove the triggers, but we can choose how we respond to the behaviour. Here are some tips for communicating:

- **Address the feeling, not the question.** When a person is asking questions repeatedly, it is not always a sign that they need information. Rather, they might need reassurance.
- **Stay calm.** Repetition can be frustrating. The person is probably unaware that they are repeating themselves. Take a break whenever possible to recharge.
- **Redirect.** Try suggesting a favourite activity or ask the person to help you with something.
- **Keep it simple.** If they are asking for information, too much detail can be confusing and they will ask again.
- **Avoid telling the person that they have repeated themselves.** Doing so will not usually end the repetition but might instead embarrass the person.
- **Replace.** If the person is doing repetitive movements, give them something to occupy their hands and attention. A stress ball can sometimes help.

For helpful examples: [Click Here](#).

For more communication tips, visit: <https://www.caregiver.org/communication-dementia>

Where can I get more help and information?

- A Dementia Care Coach can also help you find strategies and resources that fit your unique situation: <https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/dementia-care-coach/>
- Watch this Webinar: <https://youtu.be/Ys55HhyrWZo>
- Learn more about strategies from Teepa Snow: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpXeefZ2jAM&t=57s>
- Sign up for free Dementia Society events: <https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/ottawa-programs/>
 - For more information about behavioural and psychological symptoms, register for Dementia Basics.
 - For more information on support strategies and approaches, register for Supporting Dementia.
 - To connect with others facing similar situations, register for a caregiver support group.

Ottawa: 613-523-4004 **Renfrew-County:** 1-888-411-2067 | info@dsorc.org | DementiaHelp.ca

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