

# MEMORY LOSS AND DELUSIONAL BELIEFS

*Someone living with dementia may experience hallucinations, delusions and may become suspicious of those around them. It is important to know the difference between these false realities and how to respond.*

## HALLUCINATIONS

Someone experiencing hallucinations might see, hear, smell, taste or feel something that isn't there. Some hallucinations can be frightening, while others may just be pleasant situations, objects or people from their past.

## DELUSIONS

Delusions are firmly held beliefs in things that aren't real. Living with dementia can cause some people to accuse people around them of theft, infidelity and/or other behaviors. Although these can be hurtful, it is important to remember that the disease is causing these behaviors and try not to take offense.

### What causes hallucinations and delusions?

- Hallucinations and delusions happen due to the changes in the brain caused by the disease.
- Additional causes may include some medications, vision or hearing problems and other medical conditions such as dehydration or infection (e.g., urinary tract).

### How do you support someone living with hallucinations and delusions?

- Non-medical interventions are the best approach to dealing with these changes. However, medications can be prescribed if non-medical interventions have been tried and a physician deems it medically necessary.
- **Assess the situation.** Is this hallucination or delusion a problem for the person or for you? Is it upsetting to the person? Is there a risk of danger? If so, react in a quick, calm manner using reassuring words and a comforting touch, if tolerated by the person.
- **Avoid arguing.** Enter the reality of what the person is seeing or hearing and try not to take offense. Allow the person to express his or her thoughts and ideas.

## MEMORY LOSS AND DELUSIONAL BELIEFS *(continued)*

### How do you support someone living with hallucinations and delusions?

- **Offer reassurance.** You may try, *“I’m here, I will protect you. Don’t worry.”*
- **Acknowledge the feelings.** Try to understand how the hallucination or delusion might make the person feel. You may try, *“It sounds like you are worried.”*
- **Respond honestly.** If the person asks if you see it, you may say something like, *“I know you see something, but I don’t see it.”* This allows you to validate their feelings without causing an argument.
- **Offer a simple answer.** Less is more, don’t overwhelm the person with lengthy explanations.
- **Redirect the focus to another topic or activity.** Ask for assistance with something or engage them in another activity.
- **Duplicate any frequently lost items.** If the person is often searching for a specific item such as a wallet or glasses, have a few available.
- **Modify the environment.** Look for lighting that could cause disorientation and always provide adequate light in the evening.

If you need more information or have questions,  
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