

What are some non-verbal signs of pain?

If you are someone who supports a person with dementia you may find this Fact Sheet useful.

People with dementia can have pain for a number of reasons, including pain from heart disease or stroke.

People with dementia may not be able to tell others they are in pain, especially when they are in the later stages of dementia.

Non-verbal signs can help show pain in all stages of dementia. Some signs may be related to pain; others might just be a change in the way the person is acting. Non-verbal signs of pain in a person with dementia may be:

- a look of pain on the person's face
- hand movements that show distress
- guarding a particular body part or reluctance to move
- moaning with movement
- small range of movement or slow movement
- increased heart rate or blood pressure, or sweating
- restlessness
- crying or distress
- making more or fewer sounds
- withdrawing
- slowness to fall asleep or increased sleep
- disrupted or restless sleep
- low appetite (and consequently low nutritional intake)
- increased confusion
- anger, aggression, irritability or agitation.

Some people show little or no signs that they are in pain, and some of the above signs may not be due to pain but to something else.

If you are a community care worker supporting a person with dementia and you think they have pain and need help immediately, phone your supervisor. You can also speak to the family carer about your worries if they are there with you; they may know what to do.

Carers and friends should speak to a doctor if they are worried about problems with pain for the person they are supporting.