

## Paranoia



### Why does this happen?

People living with Alzheimer's or dementia may become suspicious of or frightened by others or even those who love and care for them. Changes in the brain can cause them to see the world differently. Things that were once familiar to them, might appear strange and confusing, leading them to accuse others of things such as stealing or lying. It's important to try not to take this personally as paranoia is a common behavior for people living with dementia.

People with Alzheimer's or dementia might:

- Lose an item and think it was stolen
- Forget something told to them and when retold, think it's a lie
- Feel a romantic partner is treating them differently because they're having an affair
- Be unable to distinguish what is real vs. imagined

### What can you do?

#### **Be comforting**

- Stay calm and use a gentle voice
- Don't argue ... the situation is very real to them
- Let them know they are safe and everything is okay
- If appropriate, hold their hand or give them a hug

#### **Try distraction**

- Offer a favorite food to eat or activity to do
- Help them look for missing items and discuss what you may find along the way such as photos, objects around the house, books, etc.
- Take them for a walk outside or to another room
- Talk about something they value and find important (friends and family, music, hobbies, etc.)

#### **Make the environment calm and familiar**

- Keep extra items that are often lost like wallets, keys, jewelry
- Keep their space quiet and calm
- Surround them with things they remember and cherish
- Turn off the TV or radio if a show or the news are upsetting
- Re-introduce yourself and others as often as needed
- Play music they associate with good memories

#### **Other general tips**

- Keep notes to describe the paranoia and share with the doctor
- Have legal documents ready for the police in case of an emergency (ex: if someone with dementia wanders out into the community due to paranoia). These papers should show the person's diagnosis, your relationship, power of attorney, etc.
- Remember that sometimes items really do get stolen
- Join an Alzheimer's San Diego support group or contact one of our Clinical Care Coaches to talk openly about your frustrations and emotions