

Behavioural Therapy for Dementia – A Brief Overview

Behavioural Therapy can also be of great use for people with dementia.

Behavioural Therapy can help people with dementia to **accept the diagnosis**, **prepare** them for everyday life with limited cognitive capacity and **reduce** secondary symptoms like **depression** or **anxiety**.

It helps family caregivers to better **understand** the person with dementia, avoid conflict, and increase a **feeling of competence**. Thus, **depressive symptoms** can be **obviated**.

The therapy consists of (among other things):

- **structuring the day** to increase and stabilize **daily activities**
- **biographical work** to conserve **cognitive functioning** and strengthen a **sense of self-esteem**
- **behavioural management** to reduce challenging behaviour
- **couple counselling** and **communication training** to dissolve conflicts caused by dementia
- **changing dysfunctional cognitions** for a new assessment of living conditions

Behavioural Therapy has a particularly positive impact on the following areas:

For people with dementia

- **secondary symptoms** like **depression, anxiety**^{1, 6}
- **quality of life** and **well-being**^{5, 7}
- **activity** and activities of daily living⁵
- **cognitive performance**^{5, 7}, e.g., attention, concentration, memory

For relatives of people with dementia

- **depressive symptoms**^{3, 8}
- **quality of life**⁴
- **stress**^{3, 8} and **burden**^{1, 4}
- sense of **competence**⁴

The **S3-Leitlinie Demenzen** (S3 guideline for dementia) recommends psychosocial interventions, such as reminiscence therapy and training for relatives.²

Prescription

Behavioural Therapy is especially suited for people with **mild to moderate dementia** and their **family caregivers**. If possible, the intervention should be initiated, **when the diagnosis is made**.

Health insurances usually only cover the costs of Behavioural Therapy if the **person with dementia** additionally has **secondary symptoms** (e.g., depression, anxiety) or if the **family caregiver** develops an adjustment disorder.

A few evidences of efficacy

- [1] Baharudin, A., Che Din, N., Subramaniam, P., & Razali, R. (2019). The associations between behavioral-psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD) and coping strategy, burden of care and personality style among low-income caregivers of patients with dementia. *BMC Public Health*, 19. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6868-0>
- [2] Deutsche Gesellschaft für Neurologie, & Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie, Psychosomatik und Nervenheilkunde (2016). *S3-Leitlinie Demenzen. Stand: 24. Januar 2016*. DGPPN & DGN. https://www.awmf.org/uploads/tx_szleitlinien/038-013l_S3-Demenzen-2016-07.pdf
- [3] Hopkinson, M. D., Reavell, J., Lane, D. A., & Mallikarjun, P. (2018). Cognitive behavioral therapy for depression, anxiety, and stress in caregivers of dementia patients: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Gerontologist*, 59. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnx217>
- [4] Jütten, L. H., Mark, R. E., Wicherts, J. M., & Sitskoorn, M. M. (2018). The Effectiveness of psychosocial and behavioral interventions for informal dementia caregivers: Meta-analyses and meta-regressions. *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*, 66. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JAD-180508>
- [5] McDermott, O., Charlesworth, G., Hogervorst, E., Stoner, C., Moniz-Cook, E., Spector, A., Cspike, E., Orrell, M. (2019). Psychosocial interventions for people with dementia: A synthesis of systematic reviews. *Aging & Mental Health*, 23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2017.1423031>
- [6] Orgeta, V., Qazi, A., Spector, A., & Orrell, M. (2015). Psychological treatments for depression and anxiety in dementia and mild cognitive impairment: systematic review and meta-analysis. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 207. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.114.148130>
- [7] Pinquart, M., & Forstmeier, S. (2012). Effects of reminiscence interventions on psychosocial outcomes: A meta-analysis. *Aging & Mental Health*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2011.651434>
- [8] Selwood, A., Johnston, K., Katona, C., Lyketsos, C., & Livingston, G. (2007). Systematic review of the effect of psychological interventions on family caregivers of people with dementia. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2006.10.025>

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- Werheid, K., & Thöne-Otto, A. (2010). *Alzheimer-Krankheit. Ein neuropsychologisch-verhaltenstherapeutisches Manual*. Beltz.

Further information can be found at:

Deutsche Alzheimer Gesellschaft (German Alzheimer's Association):

<https://www.deutsche-alzheimer.de/unser-service/archiv-alzheimer-info/psychologische-hilfen-im-fruehstadium.html>

Questions or comments

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments.

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I would be particularly happy about feedback regarding whether / how this information had an impact on your prescription behaviour and / or what is still keeping you from recommending (even more) Behavioural Therapy for people with dementia.