
Nursing Info 8

The meaning of sleep and movement for the care of people with dementia

Part 1 „Movement“

(Information brochure for caregiving relatives and caregivers)

IGAP

Institute for Innovations in Healthcare
and Applied Nursing Science

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Dear reader,

Movement is an essential part of our life. You can see this every day, especially in the everyday life of caregiving.

- Those who move little only have an increased risk to fall, due to the loss of physical strength.
- Those who don't move are at risk to get a pressure ulcer (bedsore).
- Those who don't move are not able to actively associate with their environment.
- Those who don't move need support to participate in everyday life.
- Lack of movement has a negative effect on the capacity of memory.
- Scarce movement leads to a bad night's sleep and thus a poor day's form – both for those in need of care and the caregivers.

Above listing could be extended in any order.

Even making the decision for being lazy and moving little requires the ability to move.

Only those who are able to move do have the choice !

This problem often appears with sick people, people in need of care, who are, as a result of their illness and a probably lacking movement support, not able to move. They depend on assistance – in every respect. This goes from the simple assistance during the transfer from bed to armchair to the food intake.

What happens during moving?

Those who move are able to sense themselves.

Those who sense themselves can move better.

Movement, sensing, and perception are strongly connected with each other. By touching and moving we become aware of our body. Touching the skin, moving the muscles and joints and changing the body positions – this all makes us learn about the borders and depth of our body, and where our arms and legs are. Our mind is stimulated and we are receptive and active. Thus, we are able to communicate actively with our environment and to perceive it with all our senses.

Sensing the own body makes us feel secure.

What happens during lying down?

Lying down means resting and thus caters for recreation normally. When lying down there is only little information given by touch and movement. This provides for few impulses only and the attentiveness decreases. The result is doziness and sleep, as well as a reduced sensation of the body.

If the patient lies down because of the reduced ability to move, the consequences are the same: The attentiveness is reduced, the patient becomes dozy and moves even less. The result is a continued decrease of the movement ability. This cycle can only be disrupted by straightening up, external stimulation, and by measures which support movement and perception.

Already after having lain down still for approx. ten minutes the sensation of the own body gets lost.

For a person with dementia the lack of sensing the own body and the loss of orientation resulting from this, are even more irritating and scary. This is one reason for persons with dementia to toss and turn in bed, as often described by their relatives.

They seek for orientation; want to sense their body again by moving and touching – until they finally fall asleep. Very soft mattresses can hamper or even eliminate this sensation. If the persons affected do not find what they are looking for, it may lead to nightly roaming – provided the person is still able to – or to sleeplessness.

The altered sleep behaviour of persons with dementia needing longer to fall asleep and to wake up becomes very apparent here. The longer it takes for the person to fall asleep, the sooner they lose the sensation of their body and the above described effect begins.

Seeking for perception, information, and movement, especially in order to sense the own body or to feel objects by touch, is one reason for the often described restlessness of persons with dementia.

How important is maintaining the ability to move?

Maintaining the ability to move means maintaining self-determination.

- Movement keeps the body fit. The muscular strength and body coordination are kept alive. This makes people feel secure and prevents from falling.
- Maintaining the ability to move means maintaining the ability to do everyday life activities, like walking, eating and drinking without help.
- Those who move can control where and how to position their body, where to put their attention and where to get stimuli from. The attentiveness is improved.
- Those who move can communicate actively with their environment. They can either speak with other people or feel objects by touch and thus make these objects real to them.
- Moving / exercising regularly improves the capacity of memory and orientation.
- Those who move can independently change the position of their body and thus provide for a regular pressure relief to prevent pressure sores.
- Movement maintains the body image and makes people feel secure.

What needs to be done?

Prerequisite for achieving and maintaining the ability to move is a consequent exercise of motion sequences. They need to be learned, relearned and maintained.

This means for the caregivers:

They need to apply something that they normally would apply only if being requested for it: **self care**.

Part of this is regular movement / exercise, which, in combination with, e.g. Thai Chi, Feldenkrais, Qi Gong or Yoga provides for the necessary relaxation and a good sensation of the own body. Working according to concepts like Kinaesthesia, Bobath, or Aktivitas, can be viewed under the aspect of self care, too.

This means for the elderly:

To work against the decline of mobility, activating offers must be made. Dancing or having a walk together supports social contacts, which again support activity.

This means for the person in need of care:

They require activating offers which are in line with their abilities, like outdoor movement / exercise or ergo therapy in a group or alone, to support them in maintaining the ability to move. Persons in need of care who cannot make use of these offers because of their underlying disease, require activating care-therapeutic measures.

The aim is to help the persons maintain the ability to sense and move their body by providing them with information of touch and by carrying out slow movements regularly. This shall preserve and improve the still existing movement ability.

Concepts like the Basal Stimulation, Kinaesthesia, Aktivitas, and MiS Micro-Stimulation® serve this purpose. They help to maintain and promote the body image by touch and movement. MiS Micro-Stimulation® means supporting the recreation of the body image by slight touch and slight movements.

The aim of this perception support is to stimulate movement. This provides for the preservation of the ability to move and thus supports the patient in independently changing their body position.

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