

## Hugs not Drugs required by Elderly

Three major areas of concern in people with dementia are loneliness, isolation and emptiness – often the very same experiences behind attention seeking behaviour.

There are no magic drugs to cure these ailments. We know from both experience and research that the best medicines for loneliness, isolation and emptiness are love, warmth and affection. These three come together when we give someone A BIG HUG.

### **Basic human need**

We all have an inherent need to live in loving, caring relationships and this also involves opportunities for close, genuine, physical contact. When we are with people we can trust and feel comfortable being close to, we usually feel good about both ourselves and life in general. Our self-esteem is boosted and we do not feel lonely, isolated and empty.

This basic human need for relationships remains unchanged for people with dementia. In fact, it might be even stronger for them as they have often experienced a lifting of inhibitions, which means they are ‘freed’ from learned social conduct.

Often, we find that the person who used to feel uncomfortable, tense up and shy away on very close physical contact, is now the very person to instigate a big, warm hug that lasts for a l-o-o-o-n-g time.

### **5 Secrets of great hugs**

So what is needed for us to be able to give a warm, loving, affectionate hug? Here are 5 secrets to giving a hug that has long-lasting effect:

1. Engage your whole body, mind and spirit in the hug so that all your energy is concentrated in the embrace.
2. Give yourself permission to hold the other person really close.
3. Allow the energy to flow freely between the two of you.
4. Experience what it’s like to receive as well as to give.
5. Hold the hug for at least 7 seconds... but do not count!

### **How to avoid creating discomfort**

When we care for people with dementia, we sometimes experience that those in the early stages tend to keep an invisible, protective ‘space bubble’ around themselves that they don’t like to be punctured.

Here are some hints to help you check whether the hug you are giving creates discomfort in the other person.

**If physical contact is not right for another person:**

1. The jaw sets tight
2. Eyelid movements become rapid
3. Muscles tense up
4. Breathing changes from deep, slow breathing to short, fast breaths from the upper chest area
5. The person pulls away.

Any combination, or all, of the above indicators alert you that the person is uncomfortable with this close physical contact and it is therefore not right to continue.

**Hugs help us to blossom**

A hug acts as a type of nourishment assisting us all – including people who have dementia – to grow and blossom.

A wise older resident once revealed a special secret name for this ultimate embrace...

a ‘huddle’, which is a cross between a hug and a cuddle. How perceptive!

**A hug – the best medicine**

A hug is the best medicine – a perfect tonic to lift the spirit, feed the soul and warm the heart of both the person giving the HUG and the one receiving it.

Next time you experience anxious behaviour, why not try a hug? You may find it has a most incredible healing effect on the situation.

A hug is certainly one of the best “cures” for attention seeking behaviour resulting from loneliness, isolation and emptiness. And, a huge bonus; HUGS come with no harmful side effects!

**A hug delights and warms and charms.  
It must be why God gave us arms.  
So stretch those arms without delay  
and give someone A HUG today.**

**Source and courtesy:** Jane Verity