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## Managing Restlessness

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### What is restlessness?

- An inability to rest, relax or concentrate
- Extreme restlessness is sometimes called agitation
- A condition that occurs in nearly half of all patients during the last 48 hours of life

### What are signs of restlessness?

- Muscle twitching
- Moving around without a known reason
- Pulling at sheets, covers or clothing
- Trying to get out of bed for no known reason
- Fidgeting
- Sleeplessness
- Inability to get comfortable
- Grimacing

### What to report to the hospice/palliative care team?

- Any of the signs or behaviors listed above
- Inability to administer medications by prescribed method
- Things that make the restlessness worse, for example: loud music
- Things that make the restlessness better, for example: soft music
- Concerns that you may have as a caregiver to cope
- Need for spiritual support
- Situations that might be unsafe

## What can be done for restlessness?

The team will try to find the reason for the restlessness and talk with you about treatments.

Things you can do:

- Administer prescribed medications as ordered
- Offer frequent reassurance
- Offer relaxation activities, for example: play soothing music
- Keep things calm, for example: decrease numbers of visitors
- Read favorite stories, poems, etc. in a calm voice
- Hold the person's hand, give them a gentle massage
- Keep the person safe, for example: do not leave the person alone while restless and check frequently when calm
- Understand that restlessness may be a sign that the patient is close to death – let other family members know what is happening

**Other HPNA Teaching Sheets on are available at [www.HPNA.org](http://www.HPNA.org).**

### Reference

*Core Curriculum for the Generalist Hospice and Palliative Nurse*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company; 2010.

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