

Seven A's of Dementia²

One way of understanding how dementia affects the brain is to look at the seven A's of dementia. Each A represents damage to a particular part of the brain. Please keep in mind that someone with dementia may not experience all of the A's.

Anosognosia means that you can no longer recognize that something has changed and that there is something wrong. You might not understand why you have cognitive problems or that you are experiencing any problems at all. Because the part of your brain that helps you reason is damaged, you do not see the changes in your abilities that others may see.

SASWH's example: a resident says "I don't live here, I am just waiting for a ride".

Agnosia means you can no longer recognize things through your senses: sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. You might not be able to sort out what you see or hear. You might have trouble recognizing familiar people. Your safety may be at risk if this part of the brain is affected because you might confuse objects and what they are used for.

SASWH's example: not able to recognize people or objects; such as using a toothbrush to comb their hair.

Aphasia means you lose the ability to use language. This includes the ability to speak, understand, read and write. Although a person may retain the ability to speak for some time, the ability to understand what other people are saying may be affected early in the disease. If you cannot understand what is being said to you, this can lead to misunderstandings between you and those around you. You might find yourself withdrawing from social interactions because you are worried that you will not understand others or that they may not understand you.

SASWH's example: may not understand or may not be able to speak; words may come out muddled/jumbled (like a word salad - they can understand the words spoken but they don't make sense in a sentence).

Apraxia means you have lost the ability to tell your body how to carry out purposeful movement. As well, if you have apraxia, you may also have trouble understanding terms such as back, front, up, down. When this happens, it becomes difficult to do things such as tying shoelaces, doing up buttons and zippers, and any activity involving co-ordination. The ability to move your body according to a certain pattern, such as coordinating hand and leg movement, also affects your ability to do specific activities such as driving.

SASWH's example: fine motor skills affected such as unable to take a step back; unable to button/unbutton clothing.

Altered perception happens when you misinterpret the information your senses are giving you. For some people, this is a bigger problem in the late afternoon or early evening when light changes. Another important change is the loss of depth perception—the ability to see in three dimensions. It becomes harder to judge how high, deep, long, wide, near or far things are. For example, if the floor and furniture are the same colour, it may be difficult to judge when one is close enough to a chair to try to sit.

SASWH's example: black flooring perceived as a hole so they won't step onto it; a television program could be perceived as real life. Sundowning - a progressive decline in functioning and behaviour that worsens throughout the day, with increased susceptibility to stimuli, aggression and restlessness.

Amnesia means loss of memory. This is an important loss because most things we do depend on our ability to remember. For example, a person with short-term memory problems loses the ability to remember what was just said. This explains why you might find yourself asking questions over and over again. Earlier in the disease a person's short-term memory will be affected. As the disease progresses, long-term memories will become harder to retrieve.

SASWH's example: forget their family is coming for lunch; may remember having to do chores as a child but now can't remember to come to breakfast

Apathy is not being able to take initiative. The part of the brain that helps you start to do something, either to carry out an activity or to communicate, is damaged. You might find that you have difficulty beginning activities. You may need someone else to give you cues (hints) to keep you involved in a conversation or a task.

SASWH's example: appear to be depressed but they aren't; need encouragement/an invitation; need to be involved

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Safety Talk Discussion

Be Accountable: Choose safety - work safe - and go home injury free!