

# Understanding Dementia: Agnosia

## The 8 As of Dementia

**Anosognosia**  
**Amnesia**  
**Aphasia**  
**Agnosia**  
**Apraxia**  
**Altered Perceptions**  
**Apathy**  
**Attention Deficit**

## What is Agnosia?

Agnosia is a condition where individuals have difficulty processing sensory information. Typically, the result of a stroke, traumatic brain injury or dementia. Imagine not being able to recognize or understand information coming from your five senses. This loss of ability is technically known as agnosia.

Agnosia can come in many forms, including:  
 Visual - *“I see him but I don’t know him”*

Those with visual Agnosia have difficulty recognizing common household objects or familiar faces. An individual may sit down at the table and begin to eat with his fingers, not recognizing the fork and spoon as utensils.

Auditory - *“I hear it but I don’t recognize the sound”*

Another person may hear the phone ring but fail to recognize that the phone is the object to be answered.

Tactile - *“I am not sure what this feels like”*

The loss of ability to recognize objects by touch. People find it difficult to recognize objects by touch based on its texture, size, and weight. This may cause embarrassment when an individual cannot find the proper facilities in the restroom. However, some may be able to describe it verbally or recognize the same kind of objects from pictures or drawings.

Environmental - *“I know this place but can’t find my way”*

This may limit the person’s ability to navigate through familiar places. The individual may become lost while driving a familiar route or fail to locate a room in his own home. The familiar landmarks disappear, and the individual feels lost and alone.

All of these losses in recognition may lead to responsive behaviours as the person tries to understand and interpret the world with these cognitive changes.

## Ways to help

- Provide a quick jump-start for the individual. Place the fork in his hand when he sits down to eat. Place clean socks near his shoes, so that he knows to put them on.
- Demonstrate correct behavior. Those with Alzheimer’s disease are great followers. Show them that the chair is for sitting, the fork is for eating, and shoes go on the feet. Brush your teeth side-by-side.
- Hang labels to identify rooms or necessary objects. If they do not recognize items in the bathroom, place signs on the sink and toilet.
- Label the cabinets in the kitchen. Make sure all signs are bold and at eye level.
- Label pictures with names of familiar people. At social gatherings, offer basic background information of other individuals to help your loved-one recognize his family and friends.
- Provide simple explanations and instructions, using as few words as possible. Use hand gestures to help get the information across.
- Introduce yourself and who you are. “Hi Dad, it’s John, your son”. This will prevent any confusion or embarrassment in not recognizing you.
- Assure that the individual always carries identification. Enroll in the Medic Alert / Safe Return program to keep the individual safe if he becomes lost.
- Keep dangerous items out of reach.
- Understand that the confusion is not their fault. Offer a kind word and a helping hand.
- **Remember that tomorrow is another day.**

Standardized Tools to Assess for Probable Depression:  
 Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS) - no or mild dementia  
 Cornell Depression Scale - can be used at any stage of dementia or without dementia