

Understanding Dementia: Amnesia

The 8 As of Dementia

Anosognosia

Amnesia

Aphasia

Agnosia

Apraxia

Altered Perceptions

Apathy

Attention Deficit

What is Amnesia?

People with dementia often experience memory loss. This is because dementia is caused by damage to the brain, and this damage can affect areas of the brain involved in creating and retrieving memories.

Memory can be affected in different ways.

These include:

- not being able to create new memories – for example, the person may forget a conversation they have just had.
- taking longer to retrieve information – for example, they might need more time to find the name for an object.
- not being able to retrieve information - for example, they may get lost in familiar surroundings or on journeys they have taken many times.

Some common experiences are:

- forgetting recent conversations or events (sometimes referred to as short-term memory loss)
- struggling to find the right word in a conversation
- forgetting names of people and objects
- losing or misplacing items (such as keys or glasses)
- getting lost in familiar surroundings or on familiar journeys
- forgetting how to carry out familiar tasks (such as making a cup of tea)
- forgetting appointments or anniversaries
- not being able to keep track of medication, and whether or when it has been taken
- struggling to recognise faces of people they know well.

These changes may be more visible to family and friends than to the person themselves.

References:

1. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-anddiagnosis/symptoms/memory-loss>
2. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/blog/how-support-dementiachristmas>

Planning for the holidays

The holiday season means many things to many people- from food, family and festivities to religious observance and quiet reflection. For people affected by dementia, it can be difficult. Here are some ways you can support people with dementia over the holidays.

1. Put decorations up gradually

Introduce the holiday celebration environment slowly so it doesn't come as a big change to the person's usual setting.

2. Keep it simple and familiar

Someone with dementia may feel overwhelmed over the holiday period so it's best not to overdo it. Keeping the day's activities low-key will help your loved one relax. Stick to familiar routines and keep celebrations short.

3. Get everyone involved

The most important thing is that the person with dementia feels included.

4. Create a quiet space

It's ok if the person with dementia wants some time away from the crowd and leaves the room to sit quietly on their own.

5. Bring back old memories

Whether it's an old song they used to enjoy or a classic holiday film, find something you can take part in that is important to the person. Making a photo album or memory box could be a nice way to spend time together.

6. Be mindful of food

A full plate can be daunting for someone who has difficulties eating. If you're doing the serving, try not to overload the person's plate- you can always go back for seconds!

7. Be flexible

It's easy to get caught up in traditions and how things have always been done in the family, but your festive season might begin to look different as the dementia progresses. It's always worth having a plan B, and be prepared to change your plans if a particular element is not working.

8. Plan ahead

Consider minimising situations where the person with dementia is put on the spot to remember names. Think about giving a gentle reminder each time a new person arrives or ask that people introduce themselves. Speak with family members in advance to avoid embarrassment.