

Understanding Dementia: Anosognosia

The 8 As of Dementia

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

Pronounced ah-no-sog-NOH-zee-uh.
The word literally means "to not know a disease".

What is Anosognosia

ANOSOGNOSIA is often mistaken for denial, stubbornness or embarrassment. In fact it is actually brain damage that can make it difficult for dementia patients to recognize their impairment. Awareness can change from day-to-day or even hour-to-hour, and this can make your loved one's behaviour unpredictable. They may resist help, refuse treatment, become angry and defensive or dangerously overestimate their abilities.

And even if they forget to bathe, miss appointments, or burn food on the stove, they're still likely to insist that they don't need help. They'll probably also insist that they're absolutely capable of living independently – despite clear evidence that things are going wrong.

Anosognosia can also make people forget their physical ailments. People may try to get up from their wheelchair and walk or transfer themselves, even though they have lost their legs or just had hip surgery.

If someone reminds them of their cognitive impairment, someone with anosognosia may get angry and defensive because in their mind they're 100% convinced that there is no problem. They forget that they forget!

REMEMBER:

The dementia patient is not *giving* you a hard time.

The dementia patient is *having* a hard time.

Ways to help

- Go with their reality
- Use "therapeutic fibbing"- which is similar to "stretching the truth" or using "white lies" to ease their anxiety
- Do not try to reason and use logic to help them understand, as they will get all caught up with the words and reasoning.
- Only say what needs to be said for the moment
- Avoid correcting them and having confrontations; pick your battles
- Present solutions positively and subtly
- Be creative with solutions

Anosognosia is not the same as denial

It's important to understand that someone who has anosognosia in dementia isn't just being difficult or in denial – this is something different.

When someone is in denial, they are aware of a fact, but refuse to accept it.

With anosognosia, the damage that dementia is causing in their brain makes it impossible for that person to be aware of what's happening to them.

Helpful resources

<https://dailycaring.com/6-ways-to-help-someone-whodoesnt-know-theyre-ill-anosognosia-indementia/>

<https://www.dementiacarers.ca/when-the-person-withdementia-doesnt-know-they-have-limitationsanosognosia/>