

Understanding Dementia: Attention Deficit

The 8 As of Dementia

Anosognosia
Amnesia
Aphasia
Agnosia
Apraxia
Altered Perceptions
Apathy
Attention Deficit

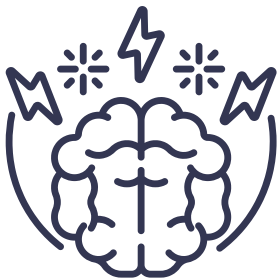
What is Attention Deficit?

Attentional deficits occur when a complex attention span is lacking. This is important because paying attention or focusing is required when trying to accomplish any task. The lack of attention occurs outside the context of a delirium, which is a sudden change in thinking or acting. For example, a person who is unable to focus may not be able to have a complete conversation or speak with someone without getting easily distracted.

Attention deficits may present as:

- The inability to sustain or shift attention
- The person may be easily distracted or perseverates (get stuck & can't switch); repetitive actions.
- The person may have trouble keeping focus on one thing or changing focus from one thing to another.

It used to be the 7As and this last symptom comes from more recent literature and has been used in dementia diagnoses since 2015



Reference:

<https://inglesideonline.org/blog/dementia-screening-what-are-the-8-as-of-dementia>

<https://www.homecarepartners.com/the-8-as-of-dementia/>

How to support someone who is experiencing attention deficits

“My husband can’t stay focused on anything! Every time I get dinner ready and I get him to sit down at the table, he gets right back up and starts wandering around the house”

Unable to sustain attention:

- Help them stay focused by having the meal ready and on the table before asking them to sit down. Hopefully the plate of food will help them stay seated to eat
- If they won’t even sit to eat, consider finger foods that can be eaten “on the go”.
- Consider smaller meals throughout the day (grazing), rather than trying to get your loved one to sit for a large, family style meal.
- Encouraging the person to sit to get some rest -find an activity that will keep them engaged for a short period, consider a drive in the car to have them seated but still engaged in the scenery, or consider a long walk outside in the morning to use up energy and possible tire them for a rest in the afternoon
- Keep expectations realistic- as the disease progresses, the attention span will become shorter and your loved one may only be able to focus on a task for a few minutes before moving on to something else

“My wife won’t stop folding and unfolding her scarf when she takes it off. She just keeps repeating it over and over!”

Unable to shift attention:

- Consider the risk of the activity that is being repeated. Does it matter if they continue to repeat? Is anyone at risk of any harm? If not, not every behaviour needs to be stopped. This activity is keeping them engaged and at some point, they will stop and move to something else
- If the activity does need to stop, try to distract them with something else rather than just telling them to stop. For example, if they enjoy gardening, bring a flower to smell or gardening tools to shift their focus to this new task and then begin the new task with them.