

Providing Care When a Loved One Denies the Dementia Diagnosis

**“Why would you think I have dementia?
There isn’t anything wrong with me!”**

If you’ve heard a person with dementia communicate this sentiment, you might have assumed that individual was merely unwilling to accept a tough diagnosis. The truth is, however, that oftentimes individuals with dementia and other conditions are experiencing anosognosia—an unawareness of their impairment.

What Is Anosognosia?

- Health conditions such as Alzheimer’s disease or other dementias, traumatic brain injury, stroke, or even mental health conditions can cause alterations to the brain’s frontal lobe and cause a person to lose the ability to take in new information and renew the perception of his/her overall health.
- Because the individual is unable to process the information about the diagnosis, it may seem as though he/she is not accepting or taking the diagnosis seriously.



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How to Recognize Anosognosia

- Individuals will display a lack of understanding, awareness or acceptance of a health condition or diagnosis.
- Individuals may be vocal in their objection that anything is wrong, or they may be confused and frustrated when people contradict what they believe to be true.
- Individuals may initially take medications agreeably to help manage their condition, only to become unaware of their condition and refuse to take medications.
- There can be fluctuations in the individual's level of anosognosia. While the individual may appear to be totally unaware of a certain struggle at the moment, the amount of awareness may shift from day to day.

Caregiving Strategies

- Work with your loved one's care physician to develop a plan of care to keep your loved one safe.
- Don't judge – remember this is a medical condition, not stubbornness or denial.
- Use a kind and respectful tone when communicating.
- Don't try and convince your loved one of his/her diagnosis.
- Be creative in the help you provide your loved one, anticipating his/her needs, so that he/she isn't forced to acknowledge a diagnosis.
- Identify ways in which you can preserve your loved one's pride.
- Make subtle changes to help keep your loved one safe, for example; you may need to offer assistance with managing finances, install more home lighting, remove trip and fall hazards, or arrange transportation for errands and shopping.
- Seek the assistance of a reliable in-home care company such as **CareWorks Health Services** that can provide companionship and help with meals and light housekeeping.
- Avoid confrontation and do not try to correct the individual.
- Approach situations positively and look for opportunities to compromise.

Anosognosia, and other characteristics of dementia like wandering and aggression, can be extremely difficult, both for the person fighting these problems and his or her loved ones. It is important for family caregivers to search for a strong network of support and to educate themselves as much as possible in regards to the disease. It is also important for family members to allow some time for self-care.

Contact us for more tips on effectively managing the effects of dementia, to allow your loved one to enjoy the best possible quality of life at all times. We partner with families to deliver safe, knowledgeable respite care services, which allow family care providers the chance to step away for a length of time to relax and rejuvenate. Whether the need is for a few hours each week or full-time, around-the-clock caregiving, we're on hand to assist.

Sources: Healthline; DailyCaring