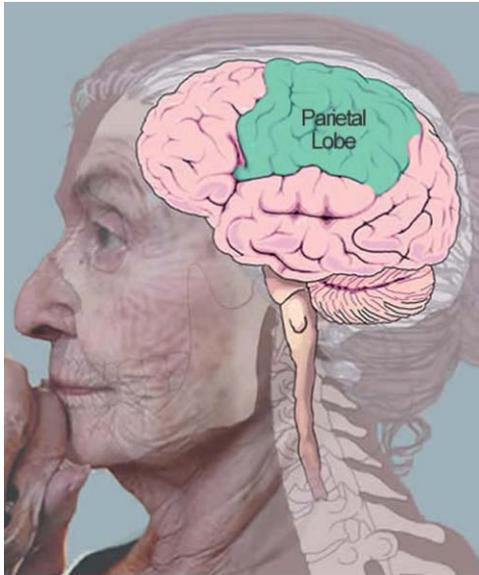


The 7 A's of Dementia

6. Altered Perception



Deficits:

- During the course of dementia, a person may experience altered sensory perceptions such as:
 - Altered depth perception
 - Visual distortions
 - Altered tactile perception
- Loss of depth perception impacts greatly on the ability to mobilize freely through the environment, and it changes the way the person walks and sits.
- Visual distortions are common and may cause misperceptions of objects, causing fearful behaviours.

Associated Behaviours:

- Verbal or physical resistance to bathing (water is perceived to be much deeper than it actually is; the individual may believe they are at risk of drowning)
- Jumping over dark thresholds (looks like a crevasse) or dark tiles in floor (looks like a hole)
- Avoiding dark flooring (appears as body of water or ditch) or flooring with bold patterns (appears as obstacles)
- Misinterpreting objects for people (clothing on a chair, pole lamps, etc)
- Misperceptions that people on TV are in the room, causing the person to talk to the TV or perhaps become very distressed by it.
- When sitting, the person may cautiously put a hand on the edge of the seat, brush the edge of the seat with a lower leg, and then sit on the edge or even arm of the chair. Although the person may be encouraged to move to the middle, he or she may not be sure where the middle is or how far down, or how far over to go.
- When walking, the person takes a more stooped pose, feet slightly apart, shoulders hunched, and knees bent a bit. The person ignores the peripheral visual fields because there is only so much information the brain can handle. The person focuses only on what is directly in front, therefore looking either straight ahead or down (mostly down).
- An inability to relate to space causing frequent bumping into objects and/or people.

Effective Care Strategies for Altered Perception:

- Identify an individual's perceptual difficulties and understand how they may cause the behaviours.
- Seek to minimize misperception by appropriate lighting and use of colors.
- Problem-solve around how to maintain safety for the person and others.