

Understanding Denial and Lack of Insight in Dementia

When supporting someone with dementia, it's common to encounter situations where they don't seem to recognise or accept their difficulties. This can be due to denial or lack of insight, and understanding the difference can help you respond with empathy and effectiveness.

Denial

Denial is a way of coping emotionally by refusing to accept the reality of dementia.

Why it happens:

- Fear, stigma, or difficulty accepting change

What it looks like:

- Blaming memory issues on ageing or stress
- Saying "I'm fine" or "Nothing's wrong"

How to help:

- Avoid arguing or forcing acceptance
- Focus on safety and wellbeing
- Offer gentle support and reassurance

Lack of Insight (Anosognosia)

Lack of insight is a brain-based inability to recognise one's own cognitive problems.

Why it happens:

- Changes in brain areas responsible for self-awareness

What it looks like:

- Genuinely unaware of memory loss or confusion
- May resist help or think they're functioning normally

How to help:

- Don't try to convince them they have dementia
- Support routines and safety without confrontation
- Work with professionals to manage care needs

Cont/

Comparison Table

Aspect	Denial	Lack of Insight (Anosognosia)
Cause	Emotional coping mechanism	Brain changes affecting awareness
Awareness	May know but avoids accepting it	Truly unaware of difficulties
Common Phrases	"I'm just tired" / "I'm fine"	"I don't need help" / "Nothing's wrong"
Response to Support	May respond to reassurance	May resist help or not understand why help is being offered
Progression	Can improve with time and support	Often worsens as dementia progresses
Support Tips	Be gentle, avoid confrontation	Focus on safety, avoid arguing