

Sensory Changes

In those with dementia



Dementia can affect a person's ability to process sensory information, leading to changes in how they see, hear, smell, taste, and feel. These sensory changes can result in unusual behaviors that seem confusing to caregivers.

Why do people with dementia have sensory changes?

Dementia can cause sensory changes by slowing down or interrupting the process of information traveling from the senses to the brain. These changes can affect a person's ability to interpret what they see, hear, taste, feel, and smell, and they may correlate with the progression of the disease.

How are senses affected?

Vision

Damage to the occipital lobes of the brain, which process visual information, can lead to misperceptions and misidentifications. Colors and shapes may become distorted due to a loss of depth perception and a narrowed visual field. This can make people fearful of walking or stepping.

Hearing

Changes in the brain can make it difficult to process certain sounds,

leading to challenges in understanding and reacting to auditory information. People with dementia may feel as though they are constantly surrounded by a cacophony of unidentified noises. They might have an increased startle response and difficulty filtering out background noise. Keeping the environment calm and quiet, speaking slowly, and minimizing extraneous sounds can help.

Smell and Taste

People with dementia may experience changes in their sense of smell, such as food not smelling or tasting as it once did. They may also develop a preference for more sugar and salt in their food or enjoy unusual flavor combinations.

Touch

Damage to the parietal lobe can lead to decreased dexterity, difficulty perceiving tactile information, and loss of sensation. Individuals may become either hyposensitive or hypersensitive. They might struggle to detect if something is hot or cold or to differentiate between discomfort and pain.