



You may have heard of dementia-related delusions, hallucination, and illusions. These are symptoms of dementia that can sometimes be upsetting. You may be wondering:

What are hallucinations?

Hallucinations are sensations that are created by the mind. The person may hear or see things that are not real. This is more common when a person has Dementia with Lewy Bodies or Parkinson's Disease Dementia. Often, the person is not bothered by the hallucination. Hallucinations with dementia might include:

- Seeing children or animals (often moving).
- Hearing, smelling, or tasting things that do not exist.

What are illusions?

Illusions are tricks played on the senses. For example, shadows, poor depth perception, or hearing loss can make someone misinterpret the world around them. Examples of illusions include mistaking:

- A lump of pillows on a bed for a person, animal, or another object.
- Sounds from television as happening in the room.
- Coats and hats hanging in the entrance as people entering the home.
- Their own reflection as a stranger in the room.

What are delusions?

Delusions are false beliefs. These beliefs are unshakable. This means that reasoning does not change the person's mind. Delusions may cause the person to hide or hoard items, refuse care, or become aggressive. Common delusions with dementia include believing that:

- Others are stealing money or belongings.
- Uninvited people have been in their home (or are on their way).
- Inanimate objects (like dolls or figurines) are real.
- Their spouse is being unfaithful.
- They are being followed, spied upon, and secretly listened to.

What causes these symptoms?

- **Memory loss.** The person might have trouble recognizing people, places, or objects. Their brain is trying to make sense of a world without all their memories.
- **Visual-spatial difficulties.** Dementia changes a person's senses. For example, their eyes may be working well but their brain has trouble making sense of what they see.



- **Health factors.** If paranoia or delusions are new, it could be a sign of an underlying illness. Talk to the doctor to rule out possible causes or medicine side-effects.
- **The environment.** Pay attention to light, sounds, mirrors, photographs, and television. Do the symptoms occur at the same time each day or only in certain rooms? Remove objects that might be triggering the person's symptoms.
- **Unmet needs.** The person may have trouble communicating their needs which can sometimes lead to paranoia or jealousy. For example, loneliness might trigger delusions of unfaithfulness. Fatigue can lead to visual misinterpretations.

How can I help a person who is experiencing an illusion?

Every situation is different. Let them know that you are here to help. Here are some things to try:

- Turn on or off certain lights to help them see better.
- Reduce noise in the room or go to another room with them.
- Investigate the item they are pointing at. Approach the item together to get a better view.
- Ask them about their experience. They may be happy to talk about what they see.
- Reassure them. If they are distressed, try calm music.

How can I help a person who is experiencing a delusion or hallucination?

The first step is to acknowledge that what they are experiencing is very real for the person. Make sure the person feels heard and understood. Consider the situation from their perspective before you respond.

For example, if someone thinks their wallet was stolen, accusing them of misplacing it might not help. Instead, acknowledge that it is upsetting to lose things and that you are here to help.

- Avoid reasoning or arguing.
- Focus on their emotion, not their words.
- Restate the person's feelings.
- Re-direct them to a new activity.

Learn more by reading the *Understanding Behaviour Changes* fact sheet [Here](#).

Where can I learn more strategies?

- A Dementia Care Coach can also help brainstorm strategies for your unique situation: <https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/dementia-care-coach/>
- Watch this Webinar for more strategies: <https://youtu.be/Ys55HhyrWZo>
- Sign up for free Dementia Society learning sessions and support groups: <https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/ottawa-programs/>

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