



# A Caregiver's Guide to Addressing Cognitive Impairment in Mental Health

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Cognition refers to mental activities we all process. This includes attention, learning and memory, problem solving, planning, reasoning and judgment, understanding, creativity, intuition, insight, and self-awareness. These mental activities can be impaired by mental health conditions.



Cognitive impairment is a common symptom in some mental health conditions.

In people managing a mental health condition, cognitive impairments may impact:

- Attention
- Memory
- Planning
- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Language
- Information processing speed
- Understanding other people's character, intentions, and behavior

Cognitive impairment may also impact how individuals managing a mental health condition take their medicine. Sticking to treatment as directed by their care team is important. Medicines are an important part of treatment for many managing a mental health condition. They may help improve symptoms and promote recovery and wellness.

## How You May Help

Suggestions to Help Individuals Cope With Cognitive Impairment The tips below were developed by the American Psychiatric Association for people with depression, but they may be helpful for those with other mental health conditions, too.

- ✓ **Remind them to be patient.** Having a mental health condition is not their fault, and any cognitive issues they may be having can be a symptom of their condition.
- ✓ **If they forget something, have them repeat the last thing they did or said.** Walk them through the motions of the last thing they were doing or the last thing they said. This may help them remember what they were going to do or say.
- ✓ **Have them repeat to you their understanding of what you just said.**



- ✓ **Help them get organized.** Help set up calendars, sticky notes, and apps on a phone or computer to remind them of things they need to do. Link activities together to help them remember.
- ✓ **Encourage them to slow down.** If you notice them speaking quickly or getting upset, encourage them to take a deep breath, stay calm, and allow for time to think.
- ✓ **Make sure they are getting enough sleep.** Sleep helps our brains function properly. Not getting enough sleep or poor-quality sleep may cause fatigue, decreased energy, irritability, and problems focusing and making decisions.
- ✓ **Discuss topics at the right time.** When making important decisions, wait until a later time when they are feeling well, since a mental health condition may cloud decision-making abilities.

## Addressing Cognitive Impairment With the Care Team

Your loved one's care team may consider the following to help address cognitive impairment:

- Medication monitoring and reminders/support
- Social work targeting logistic problems
- Symptom and side effect monitoring
- Simplifying the medication regimen

## Collaborating With the Care Team

- Keep track of questions or concerns to discuss with your providers.
- Discuss how you might be able to break down treatment goals into small manageable steps.

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## Help Is Out There

Below are organizations with resources aimed at helping address cognitive impairment.

**American Psychiatric Association (APA)**  
[www.psychiatry.org](http://www.psychiatry.org)

**Mental Health America (MHA)**  
[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) National

**Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)



## Questions? Concerns?

**Never hesitate to ask. You have a right to know everything about your health and your care.**

If you have any questions or concerns about your condition or your care, ask your doctor or a member of your treatment team right away. They are there to help you.

