

# Cognitive and Organic Disorders

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson is going to cover cognitive disorders, also known as organic disorders, by discussing:

1. Cognitive/Organic Disorders
2. Delirium and Dementia
3. Amnesia

## 1. Cognitive/Organic Disorders

A cognitive disorder is when a person has a decreased level of cognitive functioning. They might have impairment in their memory, perception, or problem-solving as a result. While these are disorders of mental processes, they usually have specific physical causes tied to them.

These types of disorders are called **organic mental disorders**. They are either inherited, the result of an injury, or the result of disease, unlike other disorders that result from psychological trauma.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Organic Mental Disorders

Mental problems that are inherited or the result of brain injury or disease

## 2. Delirium and Dementia

Delirium is a state of confusion where a person has less awareness of their environment or their situation around them. The person will also have trouble processing or gaining new information about that environment. A person in a state of delirium often acts in a very agitated or aggressive way. They can also have hallucinations. Usually, delirium lasts for a period of a few hours, but it can also last for weeks or even months.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A person wakes up in a hospital bed and doesn't know where they are. This kind of behavior is indicative of delirium.

Causes that might lead to a state of delirium include:

- Drug or alcohol use
- Infections from other parts of the body
- Disease
- Malnutrition

Dementia is a global loss of cognitive ability. It affects primarily memory, but it can also affect attention, language, and problem-solving. Dementia occurs over an extended period of time. It must last longer than six months; anything less is considered delirium. Generally, dementia is associated with older people, and can often result from natural degeneration over a person's life. Dementia can also be the result of specific diseases.

## IN CONTEXT

Samantha is a 68-year-old woman with **Alzheimer's disease**. Alzheimer's is a form of cognitive dementia that occurs primarily in people over the age of 65, and which leads to loss of long-term memory.

Samantha first experienced this loss of memory related to specific events. It eventually leads to the loss of larger amounts of her long-term memory. Samantha is increasingly moody and irritable, often as a result of her memory loss.

Samantha is at risk to eventually lose her language and bodily functions. Ultimately, it will cause her death.

Because many types of dementia are natural, most cases are irreversible. Treatments are aimed at slowing the progress of the disease, as opposed to preventing or curing it altogether.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Dementia

A global loss of cognitive ability, which primarily affects memory but can also affect attention, language, and problem-solving

### Alzheimer's Disease

A form of cognitive dementia where the person begins to lose long-term memory, and eventually loses language and bodily functions, resulting in death

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## 3. Amnesia

Amnesia is when a person has trouble with their long-term memories. A person might have trouble creating new memories, which is called anterograde amnesia, or they might have trouble recalling previously held memories, called retrograde amnesia. Amnesia is generally caused by damage to parts of the brain related to memory.

The hippocampus is a common area that, when damaged, leads to amnesia. This damage can come from brain injury or factors like alcoholism. It can also come from psychological events, like post-traumatic stress

disorder.

Treatment for the different types of cognitive disorders can vary according to the specific types as well as the causes since there are multiple causes within each of these.

➦ **EXAMPLE** For example, treatment would be different for a case of amnesia caused by trauma versus a treatment for a case of dementia, which is caused by the natural degradation of a person's brain.

Generally, though, the treatment for any of these disorders is medical in nature. This can involve treating the injury, if that is the cause, providing proper nutrition to a person, or preventing harmful processing from occurring.

➦ **EXAMPLE** For example, if one of these disorders is occurring from drug use, treatment would involve trying to prevent that person from using drugs.



## SUMMARY

**Cognitive disorders** are when a person has a decreased level of cognitive function resulting in impairment of memory, perception, or problem-solving. They are often **organic mental disorders** which are inherited or the result of brain injury or disease. **Delirium and dementia** are two related disorders. Delirium is a state of confusion which can cause a person to be agitated or aggressive. It can sometimes last for months. Dementia is a global loss of cognitive ability, characterized by lasting for more than six months. If the symptomatic timeframe is less than that, it is considered delirium. Alzheimer's disease is an example of dementia. **Amnesia**, which is when a person has trouble with their long-term memories, is usually caused by damage to parts of the brain related to memory. Treatments for all of these disorders are usually medical in nature.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia Author Erick Taggart.



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Mental problems that are inherited or the result of brain injury or disease.