

How are ya feeling?

I'm fine.

The ZONE

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"How are you feeling"? Ask anyone, and most will respond, "Well, I am fine." We all say it regardless of how we feel. People with Alzheimer's are no different. "How severe is the headache? Just a five", but her face registered a much higher number. Do body language and facial expressions display the truth? The one to ten pain scale foundation is your current pain compared to the worst pain you ever endured. Sounds reasonable, however, with failing recall, a dementia patient often does not remember their worst pain. I sense my wife's facial expression documents her consistent pain levels. What she said today is inconsistent with what she said yesterday. I hope her physiognomy records consistent, reproducible approximations of her pain, whether it's headaches or knee pain. If her conditions worsen, the rate and intensity are vital data for her doctors.



Consult the doctor, complete an online search, join an association, or learn about Alzheimer's from books, articles, or newspapers. You will likely learn of memory loss, disorientation, anger, pains, and a whole basket of symptoms. Literature, blogs, and videos discuss the disease, its effects on those around the patient, and some even try to simulate what the patient is feeling. I ask my wife each morning, "How is my lady today?" "Ok", she says, followed by a pained look of a significant headache and dizziness. Doesn't look ok to me. Sometimes she responds, "This disease is getting old!" Most of us rely on the patient's response and compare it with yesterday's to document disease progression. Recently, I noticed the lack of photos of patients in caregiver literature, posts, and advertisements. Lists of potential symptoms are everywhere, yet there are no images of the patient's face. Seems to me that how someone looks speaks volumes about how they are feeling. Out comes a camera, armed and ready to document the story told on her face. Gimmishes, wincing, smiles, frowns, puzzlement, lost, and more expressions likely tell the "how ya doing hon?" story vividly without the need for a memory. The scientific name is physiognomy. Why is this important? Likely, it's me or you reporting the doctor's changes and trends.



Happiness/Love: Her smile is genuine, honest, and engaging. She smiles when amused, happy, or surprised with unexpected humor. A medical pain expert, thank you, Penny, offered my pointers on reading patients' pain and feelings—Focus on the response and the expressions. Describe the feelings and emotions you observe. To say she is smiling or frowning describes the face, but that fails to tap into the feelings. For the images that follow, compare what you think she is feeling with the first image in this article.

Disoriented: Upon waking, she is confused, disoriented, and commonly experiences a high-level headache.



To support my simple thesis, I selected simple black-and-white sketches. Without color and pattern distractions, the black-and-white sketches bear the raw emotions. I believe these images capture the moods, feelings, and pains my wife endures each day. I took photos as best I could and gave some to Riley Royce, a gifted artist and my granddaughter, and converted the rest using an AI photo sketcher program. These drawings, not always complete, capture moods and feelings while leaving something to your imagination—the something missing feeling in her grandmother. Recently, I discovered a mood that calls the blaas; it's more of a deep concern about how I am doing, mentally and physically. She cares and knows not how to reach out and help. I will find ways she knows I need, and approach her with care, sadness, and concern for the future.

Discouraged / Discussed



Anger



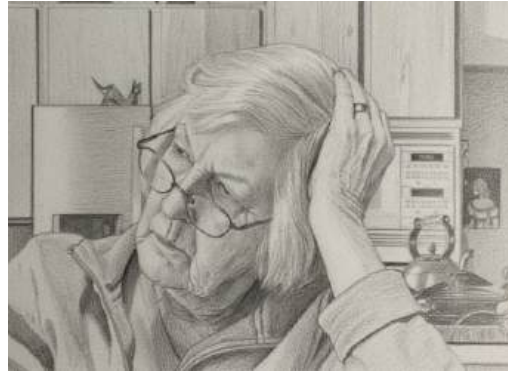
When pushed, Sally often gets defensive, scowling.

Lost

There are times when she does not know where she is—looking distracted, complete with a blank look painting her face.



Distracted



Dizzy



Pain

Each morning, she wakes with a pain behind her eyes, rated 5. The afternoon also rated 5 on a 1-to-10 scale. Study each photo, and I hope you see that the morning one is far more painful.



Morning headache level 5



Afternoon headache level 5

Tired



I find it difficult, much of the time, to see my bride of 60 + years travel the parade of pain and functional loss. I still see the soul mate I love. Yet, I can still gauge her moods, pains, disappointments, almost see each and feel them myself, and, more importantly, at least I hope, transfer these data/interpretations to her doctors. They are the best ones to suggest the best for her future. Most know our decision is to remain in the home, where her memories, her habits, her people, and her comfort live. The more aware we are of her feelings, moods, and joys, the better it is for her and for all those who give love and care. Listen to her words, read her face, and give love.

Here are some links to interesting studies I found on the topic:

<https://www.iasp-pain.org/resources/fact-sheets/pain-assessment-in-dementia/>

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12476374/>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272735826000139>

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