

# Face blindness

Supporting strategies for friends and family

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## What is prosopagnosia (face blindness)?

Face blindness (officially called prosopagnosia) is a condition recognised by the NHS. It is a **lifelong difficulty recognising and remembering faces**, often including faces of family and friends. Eyesight is normal. Faces can be *seen* clearly but it is a specific difficulty in how the brain processes them.

Face blindness is a bit like dyslexia, but for faces. It's not all-or-nothing—you don't just either recognise faces or not.

Face blind people might sometimes recognise some faces, but often they mix people up or can't work out who they are. Their brains work differently when it comes to recognising faces.

If someone with face blindness doesn't know who you are, it's not because they're being rude or not trying. There is no cure or treatment. They can't just "try harder" to recognise faces.



**Recognising people when you have prosopagnosia often requires intense mental effort, which can be mentally draining and physically tiring.**

Face blind people use context (where you are, or what you are talking about) as well as clues such as hair or clothing to help them recognise others. So, meeting someone out of context (e.g., bumping into a work colleague in a shop) makes recognition much harder.

In some cases, prosopagnosia also affects the way faces are visually perceived.

Some people may struggle to tell whether a face is male or female, or may not notice differences in skin tone, age, or facial features.



Prosopagnosia can be a stand-alone condition. However, it often co-occurs with forms of neurodivergence such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia.

The condition is specific to facial recognition and does not affect a person's intelligence or general memory. Once someone with prosopagnosia realises who a person is, they can usually remember past conversations, shared experiences, and other related details without difficulty.

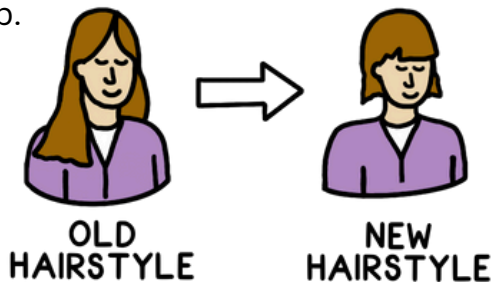
## How to support someone with prosopagnosia



Ask how you can help. Everyone experiences the condition differently, so it's best to follow the person's own advice. If someone appears to ignore you or doesn't greet you, don't assume they are being rude. It may be that they simply did not recognise you due to their condition.



If you're with them and someone else comes over that you both know, you can quietly tell them who it is or greet that person by name to help.



Let them know if you change your appearance - like if you cut your hair, grow a beard, or get new glasses. They might rely on those things to recognise you.

Before meeting, it can be helpful to send a quick message describing what you'll be wearing and where you'll be ("I'm by the window, wearing a red jumper").



Say your name and context when you greet them - for example, "Hi Alice, it's John from yoga" like you would when talking to someone on the telephone.



With greater awareness and understanding, you can help make social situations more comfortable and less stressful for someone living with prosopagnosia. Sources of reliable information about prosopagnosia that have been recommended by face blind people include:

- The NHS: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/face-blindness](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/face-blindness)
- The research group: [www.faceblind.org](http://www.faceblind.org)
- The UK not-for-profit group: [www.faceblind.org.uk](http://www.faceblind.org.uk)

For further information or to express interest in taking part in future research please contact:  
**Dr Jud Lowes, University of Stirling. Email: [judith.lowes@stir.ac.uk](mailto:judith.lowes@stir.ac.uk).**

- Responses were collected as part of Judith Lowes' PhD *Objective and Subjective Experiences of Developmental Prosopagnosia*, awarded by the University of Stirling, 2025. Funding was provided by ESRC and a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship to Anna Bobak (ECF-2019-416)
- Jud wrote a news article for The Conversation about experiences of living with face blindness that some people have said was useful to share with friends and family: [www.theconversation.com/even-mild-face-blindness-can-cause-serious-difficulties-in-daily-life-new-study](http://www.theconversation.com/even-mild-face-blindness-can-cause-serious-difficulties-in-daily-life-new-study)

- The full research paper on which this fact sheet is based can be freely accessed here: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0322469> Lowes., et al (2025). PLOS ONE, 20(4), e0322469.
- Further factsheets in this series are available free of charge from <https://faceresearch.stir.ac.uk/prosopagnosia/>

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