

Mood and Cognition in Ataxia

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DISCLAIMER



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Disclosures

- None for Dr. Carriere or Dr. Pudumjee



Mood & Cognitive Changes in Ataxia

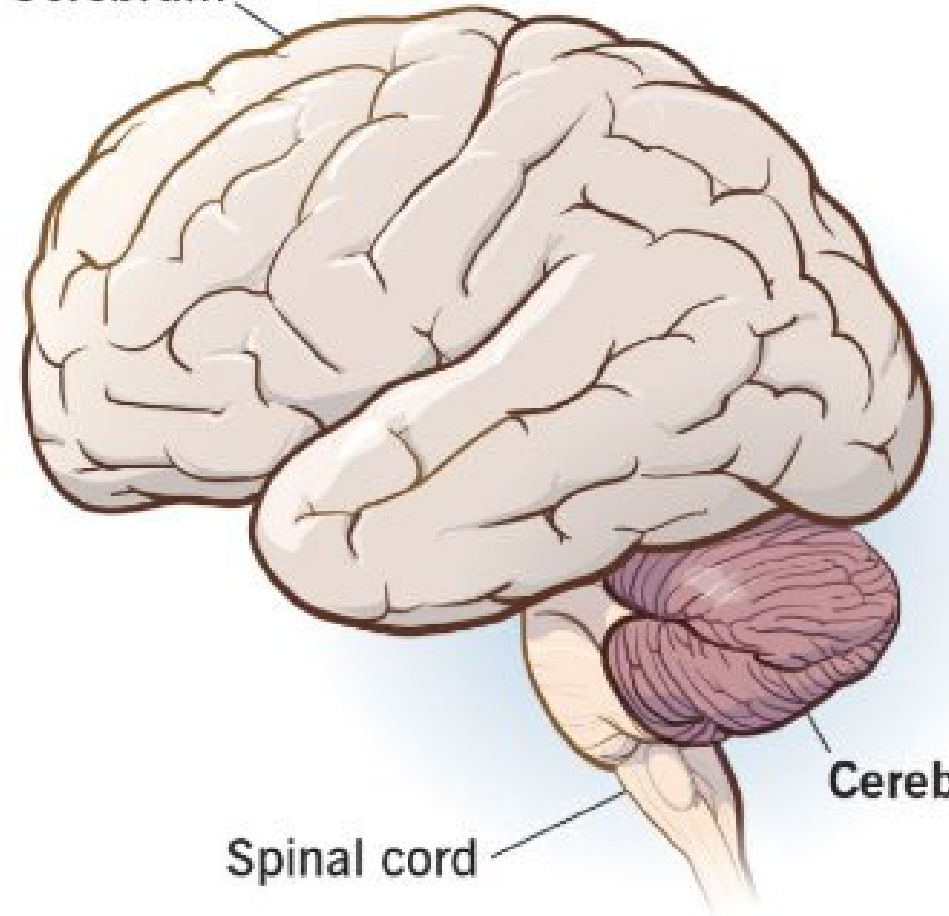
- Cerebellum plays a role in both motor and *non-motor symptoms*
- Mood and cognitive changes are common
 - Sometimes, underrecognized and underdiagnosed
- Potential for negative impact on quality of life:
 - Daily activities and independence
 - Social and occupational functioning
 - Disease management





Cerebellum

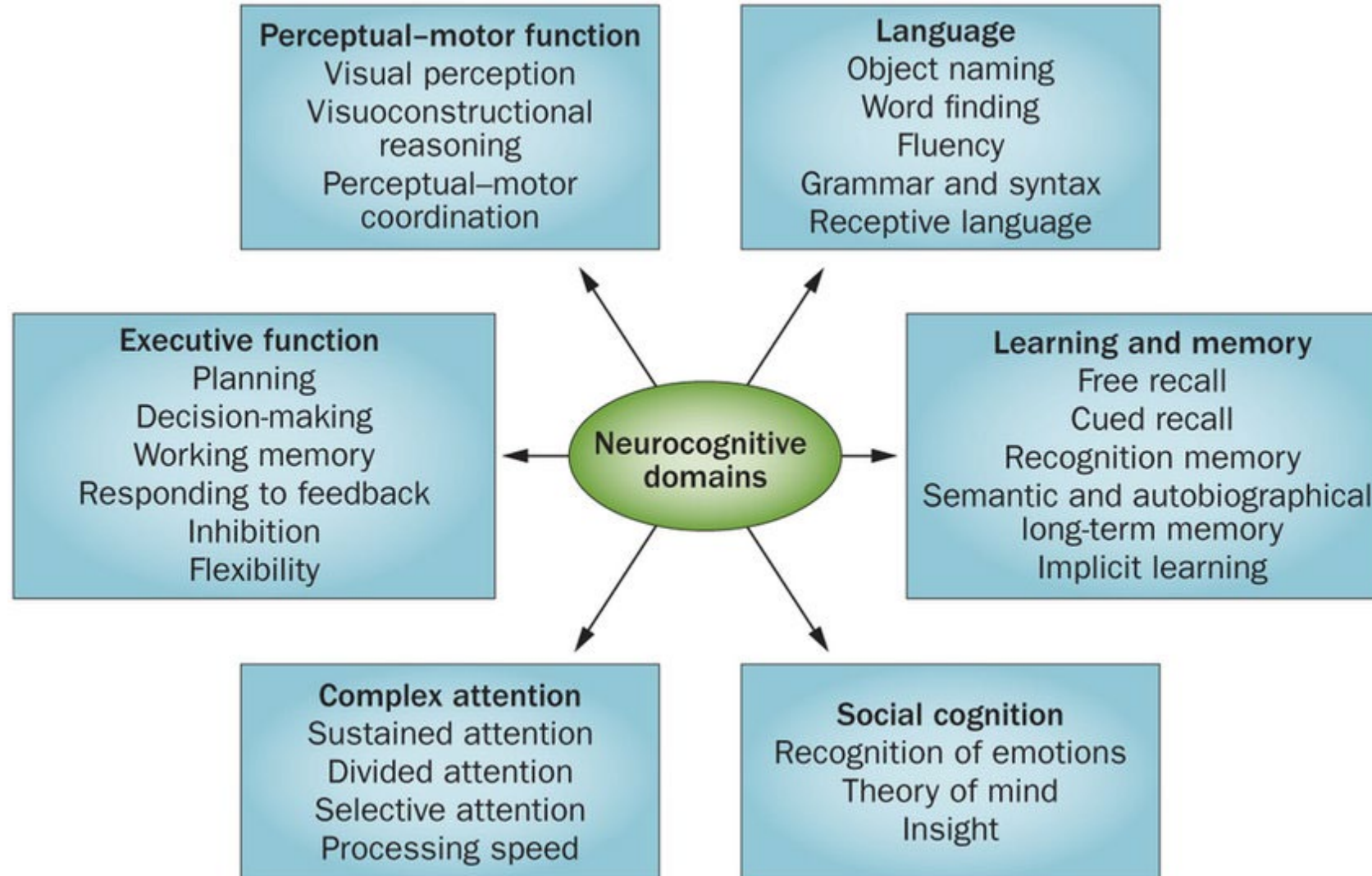
Cerebrum



Cerebellum

Spinal cord

Cognitive Domains



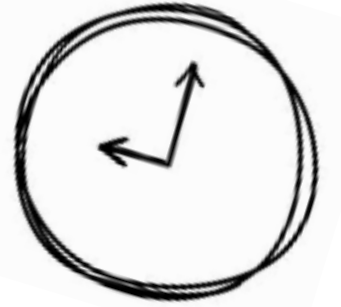
Cognitive Domains most impacted in Ataxia Syndromes

- Variability in severity and nature of cognitive impairment with specific ataxia diagnoses
- Co-morbid diagnoses often contribute substantially
- Executive functioning, processing speed, attention, memory



Attending to Cognitive Changes

- What is normal vs not?
 - Identifying change
 - Severity
 - Frequency
- Neuropsychological evaluation



Causes of Cognitive Impairment

- Neuronal dysfunction
 - Can be associated with the ataxia
- Comorbid conditions
- Medications
- Secondary to neuropsychiatric symptoms



Neuropsychiatric Symptoms in Cerebellar Ataxia

Depression

Apathy

Anxiety

Sleep
disruptions

Irritability

Agitation

Disinhibition

Psychosis

Understanding Neuropsychiatric Symptoms

- Prevalence rates are highly variable
- Symptoms vary based on ataxia type
- Clinical detection is challenging
 - Symptoms may be attributed to cerebellar (motor) dysfunction due to overlap



Depression & Anxiety in Ataxia

- Commonly occur together
- Increase disease burden
- Negatively affect quality of life for person with ataxia and care partner(s)



Attending to Mood and Anxiety Symptoms

- Persistence
- Intensity
- Interference with daily life
 - Work / school
 - Relationships
 - Health
- Observations from family and support partners



Neuropsychiatric Symptoms in Ataxia

- Etiology is complex
 - Neurodegenerative changes
 - Adjustment and burden of living with ataxia
- Motor disability and mood changes are not linear
 - More physically disabled \neq more mood and symptoms



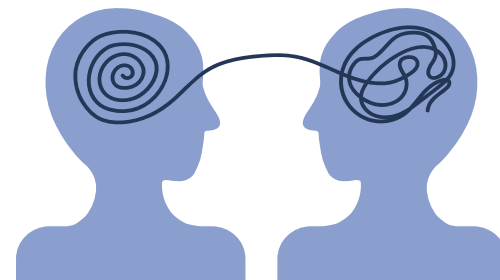
Psychological Journey with Ataxia

- Unpredictability
- Progression
- Ongoing adjustments
 - Changing body
 - Sense of self / identity
 - Relationships
 - Abilities
 - Environment
- Navigating difficult emotions
 - Fear, guilt, shame
- Celebrating joys and triumphs



Psychological Approaches for those Living with Ataxia

- Evidence-based treatments are limited in ataxia
- Available treatments for other neurodegenerative diseases:
 - Psychotherapy or “talk therapy”
 - Cognitive behavioral therapy
 - Mindfulness
 - Music therapy



Role of Psychotherapy in Ataxia

Therapy adaptations

- Disease-specific interventions
- Accessible
- Flexible
- Disease acceptance

Potential Benefits

- Improved mood and quality of life
- Increased confidence and control in managing disease
- Improved relationships

Self-Advocacy: Starting the Conversation with your Provider

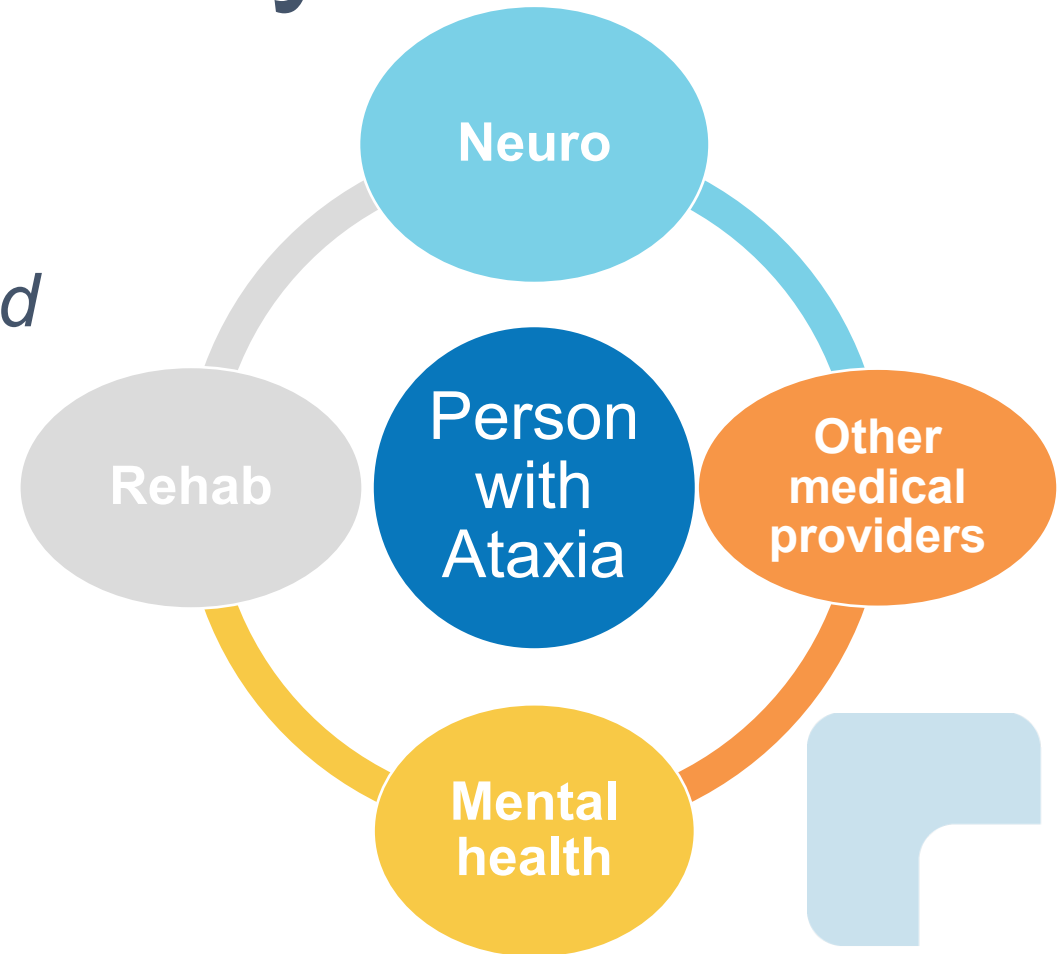
- Educate yourself
 - *What types of mood and cognitive changes might I expect on my journey with ataxia?*
- Proactively share mood and cognitive changes with your medical team
 - Discuss impact on daily life – log your symptoms!
 - Role of support partners
 - Keep revisiting conversation with provider team

You may find yourself as the expert with non-ataxia specialists



Self-Advocacy: Building Your Community

- Build your multidisciplinary team
 - *We all have a role in mood and cognitive changes!*
- Connection with patient advocacy organizations
 - Peer / family support
 - Health promotion
 - Disease-related resources



Summary

Cognitive and neuropsychiatric symptoms are common but vary across ataxia subtypes.

Potential to negatively affect health and wellness.

Individualized care is essential to promote overall well-being in living with ataxia.



Cleveland Clinic

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