

What is Dementia?

Dementia makes it harder to remember, and say what you're thinking. The most common type of dementia is called Alzheimer's Disease, but there are many other types too. Years ago, dementia was often called 'going senile'. It was thought to be a normal part of aging, which we now know is not true.



Symptoms of dementia

The most common symptoms include:

- Memory loss, including trouble with directions and familiar tasks.
- Language problems, such as trouble getting words out or understanding what is said.
- Difficulty with planning, organizing and focusing. This includes people not being able to recognize their own symptoms.
- Changes in behavior and personality.

How dementia affects the brain

Some parts of the brain control memory and language. Other parts control movement and coordination. With dementia, over time, parts of the brain begin to shrink. This often starts in the part of the brain that controls memory, reasoning, and personality. Other parts of the brain may not be affected until much later in the illness.

The stages of dementia

Dementia gets worse over time. Symptoms differ for each person, but there are 3 basic stages. Each stage may last from months to years:

- In the early stage, a person may seem forgetful, confused, or have changes in behavior. However, he or she may still be able to handle most tasks without help.
- In the middle stage, more and more help is needed with daily tasks. A person may have trouble recognizing friends and family members, wander, or get lost in familiar places. He or she may also become restless or moody.
- In the late stage, Alzheimer's can cause severe problems with memory, judgment, and other skills. Help is needed with nearly every aspect of daily life.

Treating dementia

Right now, there's no cure for dementia. But with good care, many people can live comfortably for years:

- Medicines are a key part of treatment. Some types can help slow the symptoms, such as memory loss. Others can help ease mood, behavior, and sleep problems. These medicines work for some people but not all.
- Activity and exercise are good for body and mind. Simple, repetitive activities are good choices.
- Regular doctor visits help keep track of symptoms and overall health.
- Social interactions are important to maintain.

If you think you or someone you know might have dementia, take to your doctor right away.

You can also call the Alzheimer's Association Hotline at 1-800-272-3900.