
dementia

what is dementia?

Dementia is a general term for problems with brain function. A person with dementia has memory loss and difficulties with at least one other brain function such as thinking, speaking, or problem solving. Dementia can affect social functioning, how you do your job, your mood, or your personality. The changes may not be obvious to others for a long time and the earliest stages of dementia may not be detected by family or friends.

Dementia can be:

- Irreversible.
- Potentially reversible.
- Partially reversible.
- Progressive. This means it can get worse over time.

what causes dementia?

Irreversible causes may include:

- Degeneration of brain cells (Alzheimer's disease or Lewy body dementia).
- Multiple small strokes (vascular dementia).
- Infection (chronic meningitis or Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease).
- Frontotemporal dementia. This may affect younger people.
- Dementia associated with other disorders like Parkinson's disease, Huntington's disease, or HIV-associated dementia.

Potentially or partially reversible causes may include:

- Medicines.
- Metabolic causes such as excessive alcohol intake, vitamin B12 deficiency, or thyroid disease.
- Masses or pressure in the brain such as a tumour, blood clot, or hydrocephalus (increased fluid on the brain).

for more information

Contact the following sources:
www.alzheimers.ie www.dementia.ie
www.carersireland.com
www.hse.ie
www.parkinsons.ie
www.pdsg.org.uk (Pick's disease)
www.huntingtons.ie

Samaritans 1850 609090

what are the symptoms of dementia?

Symptoms are often hard to detect. Family members or co-workers may not notice them early in the disease process. Different people with dementia may have different symptoms. Symptoms can include:

- Problems with memory, especially recent memory. Long-term memory may not be affected.
- Repeating same question over and over, or forgetting something someone just said.
- A hard time speaking your thoughts or finding certain words.
- A hard time solving problems or performing familiar tasks (such as how to use a telephone).
- Sudden changes in mood.
- Changes in personality, especially increasing moodiness or mistrust.
- Depression.
- A hard time understanding complex ideas that were never a problem in the past.

how is dementia diagnosed?

The doctor makes the diagnosis after an examination and asking about symptoms.

- The doctor may order blood tests or other medical tests to make sure another illness isn't causing the symptoms. There are no specific tests for dementia.
- The evaluation will likely include a physical exam and getting a detailed history from you and a family member. The history often gives the best clues and suggestions for a diagnosis.
- Memory testing may be done. Detailed Neuropsychological testing may be helpful.
- Lab tests and brain imaging (such as a CT scan or MRI scan) are sometimes important.
- Sometimes observation and re-evaluation over time is very helpful.

treatments

Treatment depends on the cause.

- If the problem is a vitamin deficiency, it may be helped or cured with supplements.
- For dementias such as Alzheimer's disease, medicines are available to stabilise or slow the course of the disease. There are no cures for this type of dementia.
- Your caregiver can help direct you to groups, organisations, and other caregivers to help with decisions in the care of you or your loved one.



how can i help myself?

DOs and DON'Ts in managing Dementia:

do:

- call your doctor or nurse if a fever develops, new or worsening confusion occurs, new or worsening sleepiness develops or if staying awake at all is difficult
- tell the doctor or nurse if any new behavioural problems start, such as moodiness, aggressiveness, or seeing things that are not there (hallucinations)
- tell the doctor or nurse if any new problem with brain function happens. This includes problems with balance, speech, falling a lot or if problems with swallowing develop
- talk to your doctor about any herbal remedies and medicines that you're taking
- tell your doctor about any of your medicine's side effects
- try to keep to a stable sleep schedule
- stay active, maintain usual levels of activity
- try to minimise stress
- find a support group if you think that it might help

don't:

- use alcohol or other drugs, such as antihistamines or drugs containing high amounts of caffeine
- drive when you first start a new medicine or if recommended by your doctor
- stop your medicine or change your dose because you feel better, unless your doctor tells you to

what can family or friends do to help?

Encourage the person with dementia to seek evaluation and treatment, to take their medications and to avoid alcohol and illicit substances. Ensure they tell the doctor any concerns they have about their treatment. Be aware that stressful life events such as loss of someone close, loss of a job or moving house and financial stress can lead to difficulties with mood, behavioural problems or increasing confusion.

Try to spot early signs and symptoms of a shift in mood and behaviours. Talk and reach out to the person's doctor or nurse about your concerns.

Try to clarify the person's wishes with regard to any treatment or their future healthcare, financial or legal needs plan when there are doing as well as possible. Also discuss when safeguards should be put in place.

Try to avoid caregiver burnout by sharing the responsibility with others, arranging respite care if needed and most importantly by attending to your own mental and physical health needs. Please take advantage of local support services. Remember when your loved one is unwell they may reject you... try not to take this too personally it is a symptom of the illness.