

About Dementia



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What is dementia?

Dementia is an illness of the brain. A person who has this illness has trouble remembering, learning and talking with others. The person with dementia may also have changes in personality and in the way they act. Dementia is an illness that just keeps getting worse, and usually becomes bad enough to keep the sick person from working or being able to take care of themselves. As the person gets sicker, he or she may not know family members and friends. Dementia most often happens to people more than 65 years old, but dementia is not a part of growing old. It does also happen to younger people, and sometimes even children.

There are many different kinds of dementia. While most kinds do not get better, some do. Ask your health care provider.

What causes dementia?

Dementia is what happens when brain cells are damaged. This can happen:

- During an injury to the head.
- During a stroke.
- Because of a brain tumor.
- If brain cells do not get enough oxygen.
- With some diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Pick's and also syphilis.

How will I know if my family member has dementia?

Have your loved one seen by a health care provider who can check for dementia.

What are the symptoms of dementia?

- Changes in personality and quick mood changes.
- Trouble remembering things.
- Asking the same question over and over.
- Trouble speaking clearly and choosing the right word.
- Trouble knowing people and things.
- Trouble learning new things.
- Not wanting to go out or see others.
- Trouble talking to and getting along with people.
- Trouble doing things that they used to do.
- Getting lost in places they used to know.
- Wandering off.



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- Putting things in wrong places.
- Becoming confused.
- Getting upset easily, maybe even kicking or hitting other people.
- Becoming depressed.
- Seeing things that are not there (hallucinations).
- Getting night and day mixed up.



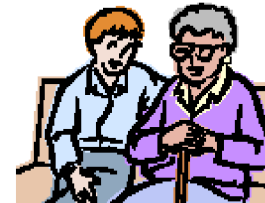
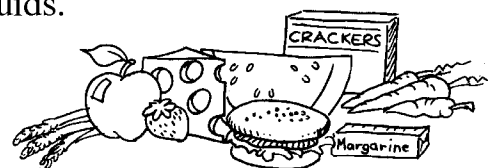
How can dementia be treated?

There is no cure for most kinds of dementia. There are now some medicines that may help lessen the symptoms of dementia. Here are some things that may help the person with dementia to live better for as long as possible:

- A regular schedule – do the same things at the same times in the same places each day.
- Write down the daily schedule and keep where it can be easily seen.

Keep things simple.

- Keep things quiet and calm. Try to move the patient's attention to something else instead of saying "no". If you can stay calm, it is more likely that the patient will too.
- Make sure the patient has enough healthy food and liquids.
- Make sure the patient has some exercise every day.
- Keep the patient in touch with family and friends.
- Use clocks and calendars.
- Label important things.
- Have the patient go to a dementia day care program if possible.
- Let the patient's health care provider know about changes in eating, energy, strength and personality. Ask any questions you may have.



Keeping your loved one with dementia safe:

- Use safety bars, night lights and non-skid rugs as needed.
- Use a bed that is low to the ground, and keep the floor free of clutter.
- Put bells or special locks on doors if the patient opens them to wander out.
- Keep dangerous things and car keys away from the patient.
- Set up a way for the patient to take medicines at the right time.
- Have the patient wear an ID bracelet which shows the phone numbers to call.



About the caregiver

Taking care of someone with dementia is very hard on the caregiver. It is important that the caregiver find time and ways to take breaks and do things away from the person with dementia. There are support groups that can be a lot of help. If you are the caregiver for someone with dementia, ask the nurse for helpful handouts and for ways to get in touch with support groups and services in your community.