

DEMENTIA

SYMPTOMS

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IMPORTANT

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Definition

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke defines dementia as:

"...a word for a group of symptoms caused by disorders that affect the brain. It is not a specific disease. People with dementia may not be able to think well enough to do normal activities, such as getting dressed or eating. They may lose their ability to solve problems or control their emotions. Their personalities may change. They may become agitated or see things that are not there."

Memory loss is a common symptom of dementia. However, memory loss by itself does not mean you have dementia. People with dementia have serious problems with two or more brain functions, such as memory and language.

Many different diseases can cause dementia, including Alzheimer's disease and stroke..."

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Symptoms of Dementia

General symptoms of dementia include:

- Memory loss, especially of recent events. This may not initially be severe; however, typically memory loss will become progressively worse.
- Finding the right words for what is wanted to be said.
- Becoming increasingly disorientated, such as not recognising familiar streets, people, and becoming confused about the time of day.

- Poor judgement, such as dressing inappropriately for the weather, or being unaware of dangerous situations.
- Having trouble thinking clearly and accomplishing practical tasks that were previously done easily.
- Becoming withdrawn, and/or prone to fits of temper, and/or feelings of anxiety and depression.

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Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease is a brain disorder named for German physician Alois Alzheimer, who first described it in 1906. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, it is incurable, progressive, fatal, and has three stages: 1) mild, 2) moderate, and 3) severe.

Warning signs of Alzheimer's include:

- Memory loss (e.g. Forgetting recently learned information, etc)
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks (e.g. preparing a meal, placing a telephone call, driving to a familiar location, etc)
- Challenges in planning or solving problems (e.g. unable to keep track of monthly bills, etc)
- Problems with language (e.g. making their speech or writing hard to understand by using confused or incorrect terms, etc)
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships (e.g. difficulty reading, judging distance, and determining colour/contrast, etc)
- Disorientation to time and place (e.g. not recognising a familiar street, and not knowing how to get back home, unable to understanding something if it is not happening immediately, etc)
- Poor or decreased judgment (e.g. not dressing appropriate to the weather/season, giving away money to strangers, not paying attention to grooming, etc)
- Problems with abstract thinking (e.g. forgetting what numbers are for and how they should be used, etc)
- Misplacing things and the ability to retrace steps (e.g. putting things in the wrong place - putting an iron in the fridge, etc)
- Changes in mood or behaviour (e.g. from calm to anger for no reason, etc)
- Changes in personality (e.g. becoming confused, suspicious, fearful, or dependent on a family member, etc)
- Loss of initiative (e.g. becoming very passive, sitting in front of the TV for hours, sleeping more than usual, etc)

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Alzheimer symptoms progress as follows:

- 1) Memory loss and other cognitive deficits
- 2) Major personality changes
- 3) Loss of control over bodily functions
- 4) Death

End

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