



Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease Information Sheet

Dementia is the loss of multiple intellectual abilities. It is progressive and results from the death or permanent disability of nerve cells that store information in the brain; the information stored in dead nerve cells is lost. Dementia patients lose memory (amnesia), communication skills (aphasia), daily living skills (apraxia), and the ability to recognize faces or things (agnosia).

The most common causes of dementia are:

Alzheimer's disease: 60%

Vascular Dementia: 10-20%

Lewy Body Dementia: 10-20%

Frontotemporal: 10-15%

Facts

- Over 5 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease (AD) today. This number could reach 14-18 million by 2050 as the elderly population expands.
- As many as 500,000 people under age 65 have early onset Alzheimer's disease.
- Right now 1 in 8 persons over age 65, and nearly 50% of those over age 85, have dementia.
- Alzheimer's disease is the fifth leading cause of death among individuals over the age of 65.
- Dementia affects both men and women in all racial, religious, and socioeconomic groups.

Symptoms of Dementia

The symptoms of dementia change over time. Caregiving is easier when the caregiver understands present and future symptoms. No two patients follow the same path. Different dementia experts discuss the disease process in terms of "stages." Most dementia patients pass through multiple stages. Based on general overall functional ability, the progress of dementia can be divided into three stages:

Early (years 0 to 5)

- Mild amnesia (memory loss), good function at home, few psychiatric symptoms

Middle (years 3 to 10)

- Much intellectual impairment, poor function at home, many psychiatric/behavioral problems

Last (years 5 to 20)

- Multiple, severe intellectual impairments
- No function at home
- Total care and help with all activities of daily living: eating, dressing, toileting, walking
- Loss of bowel and bladder function

Markers of Dementia

Trouble forming new memories

Relying on memory helpers

Trouble finding words

Struggling to complete familiar actions

Misplacing familiar objects

Onset of new depression or irritability

Making bad decisions

Personality changes

Loss of interest in important responsibilities

Confusion about time, place or people

Seeing or hearing things that aren't there

Expressing False beliefs



What causes dementia?

Dementia is caused by the death of nerve cells in the brain. Once a nerve cell dies, it cannot be replaced and its function is lost. Researchers believe a combination of genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors are the cause.

- **Alzheimer's Disease**- Degenerative disease attacks the brain, resulting in impaired function.
- **Vascular Dementia**- caused by reduced blood supply to the brain, usually due to stroke.
- **Lewy Bodies**- protein deposits in nerve cells in the brain.
- **Fronto-Temporal**- many different causes that affects the front and sides of the brain.

Is Intellectual Decline Reversible?

A small number (5%-20%) of elderly patients who appear to have dementia have treatable diseases such as depression, hormonal imbalance (i.e., hypothyroidism), or drug-induced (i.e., medication) confusion.

Are there any Treatments Available?

There are no treatments that can stop nerve cell death in Alzheimer's disease.

Medications such as Aricept, Exelon, Razadyne, and Namenda may slow the disease process.

Cognitive exercises and social activities also may slow the progression of the disease.

Support and Care

Essential components to support the person with dementia include the following services:

1. Inpatient and outpatient clinical evaluation and treatment
2. Family support groups
3. Educational programs
4. Adult day care/Adult Day Health for people with dementia
5. Respite care
6. Home health personal services
7. Adult family homes
8. Assisted living facilities
9. Nursing home dementia units

Plan Ahead: Some Issues to Consider

Health Care

1. Prepare (or update) a living will and a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care.
2. Be sure your doctor knows your overall long-term care concerns and wishes.
3. Fill out the Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST).
4. Talk with your family or a close friend about your wishes.
5. Create and put in place an action plan in case the caregiver becomes injured, sick or has an emergency.

Legal and Financial

1. Review your legal documents (consider talking with an elder law attorney).
2. Make a record of your assets.
3. Place important documents in a safe, secure place and advise key people where this is.
4. Make and record any pre-planning arrangements so others will know your wishes.
5. Review your insurance and consider if you need or want long-term care insurance.