

Dementia & Alzheimer disease

What is dementia?

- Dementia is a loss of mental skills that affects your daily life
- It can cause problems with your memory and how well you can think and plan.
- It damages the brain. It causes loss of memory and loss of other abilities.
- It gets worse over time, but how quickly this happens varies.
- Alzheimer’s dementia is the most common type of dementia.

What causes dementia?

Dementia is caused by damage or changes in the brain.

Things that can cause dementia include:

- Alzheimer’s disease
- Strokes, tumors, or head injuries
- Other disease

What are the symptoms?

- Usually, the first symptom is memory loss. Other notice more
- As dementia gets worse:
 - More trouble planning
 - Trouble speaking or listening
 - Get lost in familiar places
- Over time:
 - Act very differently
 - Be scared or violent
 - Become needy and childlike
 - Stop brushing their teeth or bathing
- Later:
 - Cannot take care of themselves
 - Not know where they are
 - Not recognize their loved ones

Forgetfulness and dementia

Forgetting	Forgetting	Misplacing	Misplacing
Forgetting things sometime is normal	Forgetting often simple words, facts, family members, familiar places is not normal	Misplacing things sometimes is normal	Misplacing things in places that do not make sense is not normal e.g.: keys in the fridge, glasses in the microwave...

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Warning signs of dementia

- Memory loss that affects day-to-day abilities
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks
- Problems with language
- Disorientation to time and place
- Impaired judgement
- Problems with abstract thinking
- Misplacing things
- Changes in mood and behaviour
- Changes in personality
- Loss of initiative
- Challenges understanding visual and spatial information

How is dementia diagnosed?

- Visit a doctor
- Physical examination
- Illnesses and life events
- Close family member to check details
- Your doctor may ask you to:
 - Tell what day and year it is
 - Repeat a series of words
 - Draw a clock face
- Causes that can be treated:
 - Blood tests (thyroid, infection)
 - Tests MRI or CT scan (picture of your brain – tumor or brain injury)
 - Medicines

How is it treated?

- There are medicines you can take for dementia
- No cure but
- Slow down and
- Easier to live with

Helping a loved one who has dementia

In early dementia, most people can function independently

- Your role is important
- Support to plan for future
- Encourage to make an advance care plan
- Name a person who will make care decision
- Home care is available
- Transition to a supportive living facility or long-term-care facility

Care	Kindness	Support
More care as dementia gets worse.	Be kind to yourself.	Schedule breaks to recharge, and ask for support

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What increases your risk

- Age
- Have had a stroke
- Have diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- atherosclerosis

Prevention

- Treat or prevent high blood pressure
- Don't smoke
- Stay at a healthy weight
- Keep your cholesterol in the normal range
- Get plenty of exercise
- Stay mentally alert
- Stay involved socially
- If your doctor recommends it, take aspirin

Resources

- Healthlink Alberta 811 – 24/7, free, interpretation available, nurse advise
- Alzheimer society of Alberta and NW territories – strategies, programs, support & research
- <http://DiversityCalgary.ca> for translated health information