



Alzheimer's Disease vs. Dementia

According to the Alzheimer's Association, there are 5.8 million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease. By 2050, these numbers are projected to increase to nearly 14 million. You may have heard the terms Alzheimer's disease and dementia used interchangeably. Alzheimer's disease and dementia are in fact different terms with different meanings.

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive disease of the brain that slowly causes impairment in memory and cognitive function. It affects memory, language and thought. The disease typically progresses in three general stages – mild (early stage), moderate (middle stage) and severe (late stage).

Dementia is not a specific disease, but it is more of an overall term used to describe a group of symptoms associated with decline in memory or other thinking skills. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia, responsible for approximately 60 to 80 percent of all cases of dementia, but there are over 50 types of dementia. While some cognitive decline is age-related, neither is considered a part of normal aging.

There are many causes of dementia including degenerative neurological diseases such as; Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and Huntington's disease. Additionally, vascular disorders, traumatic brain injuries, central nervous system infections, long-time alcohol or drug use may cause dementia. In most cases dementia is not reversible, but there are some drug treatments that may temporarily improve symptoms.

While the symptoms of Alzheimer's and dementia can overlap, there can be some differences. Both conditions may cause a decline in the ability to think, impaired memory, and a difficulty with communication. Alzheimer's disease symptoms may include; difficulty remembering recent events, depression, impaired judgment, confusion, lack of personal hygiene and behavioral changes.

If you think you or a loved one are exhibiting symptoms of Alzheimer's disease or dementia, be sure to schedule an appointment with your doctor immediately. The earlier it's detected and diagnosed, the sooner treatment can begin.



There are many benefits to early detection. First, it allows access to treatment options that may not be available in the more advanced stages of the disease. While there is no cure an early diagnosis gives a better chance of benefitting from treatment. This includes a possibility to participate in a variety of clinical trials. Secondly, an early diagnosis allows more time for you and your loved one to plan for the future. You'll be able to communicate your wishes to your family about what you want during each stage of the disease. Additionally, planning ahead allows you to express your wishes about your legal, financial and end-of-life decisions.

There are many resources available to those diagnosed, as well as their families who provide care to their loved ones. Information and support can be found online at the Alzheimer's Association, www.alz.org, and includes a 24/7 helpline, **(800) 272-3900**.

Early warning signs of Alzheimer's	Typical age-related changes
✓ Memory loss that disrupts daily life	✓ Occasionally forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later
✓ Changes in mood and personality	✓ Developing very specific ways of doing things and irritability when that routine is disrupted
✓ Challenges in planning or solving problems	✓ Making occasional errors when balancing a checkbook
✓ Difficulty completing familiar, daily tasks	✓ Occasionally needing help to use settings on a microwave
✓ Confusion with time or place	✓ Getting confused about the day of the week, but remembering later
✓ Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships	✓ Vision changes related to cataracts
✓ New problems with words in speaking or writing	✓ Sometimes having trouble finding the right word
✓ Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps	✓ Misplacing items from time to time and retracing steps to find them
✓ Decreased or poor judgment	✓ Making a bad decision once in a while
✓ Withdrawal from work or social activities	✓ Sometimes feeling weary of work, family or social obligations

