



Tips for Understanding Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia

Frequently confused with Alzheimer's disease, dementia is actually the term for a collection of symptoms including memory loss, personality change and impaired intellectual functions resulting from disease or trauma to the brain that are not part of normal aging.

The Difference Between Alzheimer's and Dementia

According to the Alzheimer's Association article, "What is Dementia?":

- Unlike Alzheimer's, dementia is not actually a specific disease. These changes and are severe enough to affect daily living, independence and relationships.
- [Alzheimer's disease](#) accounts for about 60 to 80 percent of all dementia cases.
- [Vascular dementia](#), which occurs after a stroke, is the second most common dementia type.
- There are many other conditions that can cause symptoms of dementia, including some that are reversible, such as thyroid problems and vitamin deficiencies.

Alzheimer's and Dementia Basics

- **Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia** – It is estimated that as many as 5.1 million Americans may currently have Alzheimer's disease, which accounts for up to 80 percent of all dementia cases.
- **Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging** – While the greatest known risk factor is increasing age, and the majority of people with Alzheimer's are 65 and older, Alzheimer's is not just a disease of "old age." Up to five percent of people with the disease have "early onset" Alzheimer's, which often appears when someone is in their 40s or 50s.
- **Alzheimer's worsens over time** – As a progressive disease, Alzheimer's symptoms gradually worsen over a number of years. In its early stages, memory loss is mild, but with late-stage Alzheimer's, individuals lose the ability to carry on a conversation and respond to their environment.
- **Alzheimer's is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States** – Those with Alzheimer's live an average of eight years after their symptoms become noticeable to others. However, survival can range from four to 20 years, depending on age and other health conditions.
- **Alzheimer's has no current cure, but treatments for symptoms are available and research continues** – Although current medical treatments cannot stop Alzheimer's from progressing, they can temporarily slow the worsening of dementia symptoms and improve quality of life for those with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. Today, there is a worldwide effort underway to find better ways to treat the disease, delay its onset and even prevent it from developing.

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