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# 12 Myths About Alzheimer's Disease

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Alzheimer's disease affects millions of Americans and is a leading cause of death in the United States. It's important to distinguish the facts from the myths about Alzheimer's, especially when it comes to finding information online. Read on to learn about common myths surrounding this disease.

## Myth 1: Alzheimer's disease and dementia are the same thing.

People often use the terms Alzheimer's and dementia interchangeably, but there is a difference. Dementia refers generally to conditions that lead to impaired memory, thinking, reasoning, and behavior, and Alzheimer's is just one type of dementia. The terms are likely confused because Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia and the most well-known. Other types of dementia include [Lewy body dementia](#), [frontotemporal dementia](#), and [vascular dementia](#).

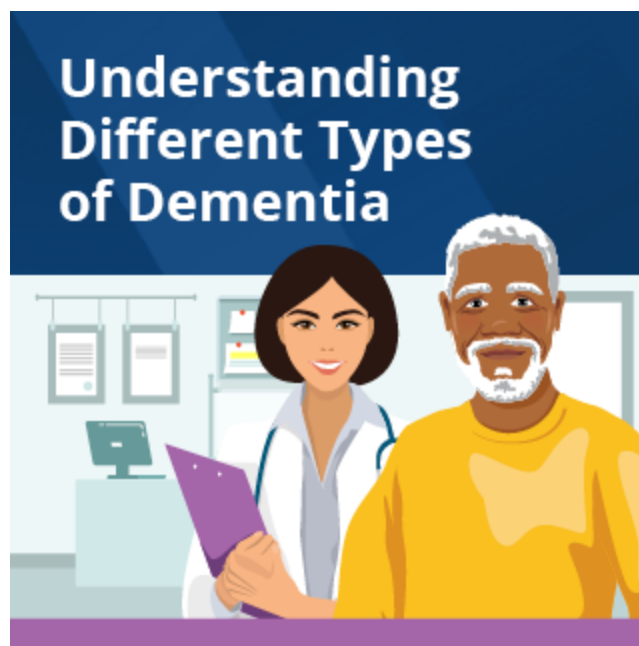
Learn more about [Alzheimer's and related dementias](#).

## Myth 2: I will develop Alzheimer's disease if my parent has it.

If a parent or close relative has Alzheimer's, you may be worried about developing it as you get older. A person's chance of developing Alzheimer's is higher if they have certain genetic variants that can be passed down from a parent. However, in most cases, just because a biological parent has Alzheimer's does not mean their children will develop it.

Alzheimer's is complex, and scientists don't yet fully understand what causes it in most people. Research suggests that in most individuals, a host of factors beyond genetics play a role in the development and course of the disease. Environmental and lifestyle factors such as exercise, diet, exposure to pollutants, and smoking may also affect a person's risk for Alzheimer's. Although we don't yet know how to prevent the disease, it's important to practice healthy behaviors throughout your lifetime, such as [exercising regularly](#) and [eating a balanced diet](#).

Learn more about [Alzheimer's genetics](#).



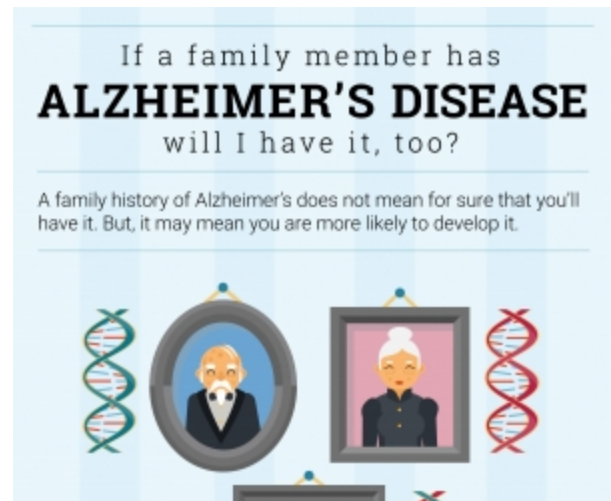
[Share this infographic](#) and help spread the word about understanding different types of dementia.

### Myth 3: Only people in their 70s and older develop Alzheimer's disease.

While the greatest known risk factor for Alzheimer's is age, this does not mean that *only* older adults develop it. For most people with Alzheimer's, it's true that symptoms first appear in their mid-60s or beyond. However, some people experience symptoms earlier, even as young as in their 30s. When a person develops Alzheimer's between their 30s and mid-60s, it's called early-onset Alzheimer's. Early-onset Alzheimer's is rare — representing less than 10% of people with the disease. Developing Alzheimer's earlier in life can present specific challenges. People diagnosed at younger ages are more likely to be raising children or working outside the home, or both.

Many people living with [Down syndrome](#), a genetic condition, will also develop Alzheimer's at an earlier age and may begin to show symptoms in their 40s.

Learn more about the [causes of Alzheimer's](#).



[Read and share this infographic and help spread the word about Alzheimer's genetics.](#)

### Myth 4: Alzheimer's disease symptoms are normal as we get older.

Many people become more forgetful as they age, and some forgetfulness, such as losing things from time to time, is normal. However, common [signs and symptoms](#) of Alzheimer's, such as making poor judgments and decisions a lot of the time, having problems recognizing friends and family, or losing track of the date or time of year are **not** a normal part of aging.

If you are worried about your memory or other possible Alzheimer's symptoms, [talk with your doctor](#). The doctor may ask questions about your health history, perform assessments of your thinking and memory, and conduct medical tests to determine your diagnosis.

Learn more about the [signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's](#).

## Is Forgetfulness Normal or Not?



### **Myth 5: There are no treatments available for people with Alzheimer's disease.**

In recent years, significant progress has been made toward developing better treatments for people living with Alzheimer's. Several medications are now available to treat symptoms and slow the disease in some people. Coping strategies are also available to help manage behavioral symptoms.

While there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's, research has never been more promising thanks to scientific advances. In total, NIA is [funding hundreds of clinical trials](#) including both drug and nondrug interventions. These include testing treatments that target the underlying causes of the disease as well as behavior and lifestyle factors.

Learn more about [how Alzheimer's is treated](#), including FDA-approved medications, and [where to find Alzheimer's clinical trials](#).

### **Myth 6: If I'm frequently forgetting things, it must be Alzheimer's disease.**

Even though memory problems are typically one of the first signs of Alzheimer's, not all memory problems mean a person has the disease. Some forgetfulness is normal as we age.

[Talk with your doctor](#) to determine whether the memory changes you're noticing are normal or may be a sign of something more serious. In some cases, [depression](#) or [medication side effects](#) can cause memory and other thinking problems. It may be possible to reverse some memory problems depending on the cause.

Learn more about [what's normal memory loss and what's not](#).

## Myth 7: You can buy supplements online to prevent or cure Alzheimer's disease.

There are many websites and advertisements that promise certain supplements can effectively prevent, delay, treat, or cure diseases such as Alzheimer's. In some cases, the information may seem reliable, offering advice on healthy aging and Alzheimer's to gain trust and promote their products. However, there is no scientific evidence backing these claims, and currently, no supplement has been proven to delay, prevent, treat, or cure Alzheimer's.

Learn more about the [safety and side effects of specific supplements](#). Talk with your doctor before taking any supplements or trying any other new treatments.

Find tips to help determine [whether an online health information article is reliable](#).

## Myth 8: You can prevent Alzheimer's disease.

There is no proven way to prevent Alzheimer's. However, there are steps you can take to help reduce your risk for this disease. A risk factor is something that may increase a person's chance of developing a disease. Some risk factors can be controlled, while others, such as the genes you inherit, cannot.

In general, leading a healthy lifestyle may help reduce risk factors that have been associated with Alzheimer's and other age-related health problems. These include:

- Controlling [high blood pressure](#)
- [Maintaining a healthy weight](#)
- Staying [mentally and physically active](#)
- Preventing head injury
- [Sleeping seven to nine hours](#) each night
- [Wearing hearing restorative devices](#) (such as hearing aids and cochlear implants), if needed

Learn more about [what we know about preventing Alzheimer's](#) — including the benefits of high blood pressure control — and [reducing your risk for Alzheimer's](#).

## Myth 9: Doctors cannot definitively diagnose someone with Alzheimer's disease until after death.

Before researchers developed [biomarker tests](#) in the early 2000s, the only sure way to know whether a person had Alzheimer's was through autopsy, a procedure that is performed after death. Now, lab and imaging tests are available to help a doctor or researcher see the biological signs of the disease in a living person. For example, it is now possible for doctors to order a blood test to measure levels of beta-amyloid, a protein that accumulates abnormally in people with Alzheimer's. Several other blood tests are in development. However, the availability of these tests is still limited. NIA-funded scientists continue to study options for faster, less



expensive, and less invasive ways to diagnose Alzheimer's.

Learn more about [biomarkers and Alzheimer's detection and research](#).

## Myth 10: An at-home genetic test can tell me if I have (or will have) Alzheimer's disease.

You may have heard about at-home genetic tests. These tests extract DNA from a person's saliva and provide reports of the genetic data. It's important to note that no genetic test can definitively diagnose Alzheimer's. Genetic tests can identify certain rare genetic variants that cause early-onset Alzheimer's, as well as genetic variants that increase a person's risk for the disease. [FDA has approved one of these tests](#) for at-home use. This test shows if a person carries a form of the *APOE* gene, *APOE* ε4. People with this variant are at an increased risk for Alzheimer's, but it does not mean that they will definitely develop the disease.

[Talk with your doctor](#) about these types of genetic tests. You also may want to schedule an appointment with a genetic counselor to help you consider whether a test is right for you and to understand the results.

Learn more about [Alzheimer's genetics](#).

## Myth 11: I'm not a scientist so I can't do anything to help fight Alzheimer's disease.

Even if you are not a scientist, there are many ways you can help advance Alzheimer's research! Volunteers participating in [clinical trials and studies](#) have led to meaningful advancements in the detection, diagnosis, and treatment of Alzheimer's. By joining a trial or study, you become a partner in helping researchers advance their knowledge toward effective diagnostics, treatments, and preventions. All types of volunteers are needed, including people living with dementia, caregivers, and healthy participants.

As a family member or friend of a person living with Alzheimer's, you can also help by offering support, such as learning [tips for communication](#) or finding [suitable activities](#). You can also offer help by [supporting caregivers](#) of people with Alzheimer's or a related dementia.

Learn more about [participating in Alzheimer's research](#) and [where to find a clinical trial](#).

## Myth 12: Aluminum causes Alzheimer's disease.

Aluminum is a metal commonly found in things such as pots, pans, and even the Earth's soil. Scientists are still trying to understand if there is a link between aluminum and Alzheimer's. For example, autopsy studies have shown higher levels of aluminum in the brains of people with Alzheimer's than those without Alzheimer's, but it's unclear



[Read and share this infographic](#) about the types of volunteers needed for dementia research.

what role aluminum may play. Researchers continue to explore how environmental factors, such as metals, air pollution, and other chemicals, may affect a person's risk of developing Alzheimer's.

### You may also be interested in

- Reading more about [Alzheimer's and related dementias](#)
- Watching a [video on dementia](#)
- Learning about [participating in Alzheimer's research](#)

This content is provided by the NIH National Institute on Aging (NIA). NIA scientists and other experts review this content to ensure it is accurate and up to date.

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