

# Early-onset Alzheimer's disease



**Alzheimer's  
Research  
UK**

**The Power  
to Defeat  
Dementia**



This leaflet aims to give an introduction to early-onset Alzheimer's disease. It's for anyone who might be worried about themselves or somebody else.

It was written in March 2014 and will be updated in March 2016. Please get in touch if you'd like a version with references or in a different format.

Dementia is used to describe a group of symptoms – including memory loss, confusion, mood changes and difficulty with day-to-day tasks. There are many causes of dementia, with Alzheimer's disease the most common.

### **What is early-onset Alzheimer's?**

Although often thought of as a disease of the elderly, around 4% of people with Alzheimer's are under 65. This is called early-onset or young-onset Alzheimer's. It usually affects people in their 40s, 50s and 60s.

Alzheimer's is the most common cause of early-onset dementia. However there are other causes in younger people such as frontotemporal dementia and vascular dementia. Contact us for more information on these kinds of dementia.

If you are worried about yourself or someone else who is showing symptoms of dementia, talk to your GP. They will be able to rule out other health issues such as depression or anxiety which may cause similar symptoms in younger people. They will also be able to refer you to a specialist for other tests if necessary.

While some symptoms can be similar to those of late-onset Alzheimer's, the disease can also reveal itself in more unusual ways in younger people.

This can make it more difficult for people, families and doctors to recognise.

### Symptoms can include:

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#### Memory

Memory problems which interfere with everyday life. This may include forgetting messages or recent events which would normally be remembered, or repeating questions.



#### Confusion

People may become confused in unfamiliar situations and lose a sense of place and time.



#### Changes in personality and behaviour

These may be subtle at first and could include apathy, depression or loss of confidence.



### Language

Difficulty finding the right words and communicating. This may sometimes be called progressive aphasia.



### Visual problems

People can have difficulty recognising words and objects and judging speed or distance. When visual problems are a major symptom the disease may be called posterior cortical atrophy.

Alzheimer's is a progressive disease, which means that symptoms get worse over time. For more details about diagnosis, ask us for our booklet '**All about dementia**' or talk to your doctor.



## Frequently asked questions

### Can I inherit early-onset Alzheimer's?

In most cases the answer is no. Inherited or 'familial' forms of Alzheimer's are very rare.

Several genes have been found that play a role in the development of rare familial Alzheimer's. Mistakes in these genes (called mutations) can cause the build-up of a toxic protein called amyloid in the brain. If someone has a strong family history of Alzheimer's at a young age, genetic testing may be suggested and genetic counselling may be offered to close relatives. For more information, ask for our booklet **'Genes and dementia'**.

In the vast majority of cases, the cause is still unclear. It is likely to be a combination of our age, lifestyle and genetic make-up.



### Will early-onset Alzheimer's progress faster?

It is difficult to know. There is some evidence that early-onset Alzheimer's may progress faster and more aggressively, but experts are unsure whether this is conclusive. Every person's experience is different and there can be a huge amount of variability in people's response to the disease. Difficulties with diagnosis may mean that people are diagnosed later, making their progression seem faster. Research into better methods of detection will help to improve early diagnosis.

### Help and support

There are treatments available for people with early-onset Alzheimer's. These include drug and non-drug treatments which can help relieve some symptoms of the disease. For detailed information talk to your doctor or request our free '**Treatments for dementia**' booklet using the slip.

The impact of early-onset Alzheimer's can be significant – people are often working and may have young families. There are organisations that offer advice, information, care, and practical and emotional support. For a full list, visit our website at **[www.alzheimersresearchuk.org](http://www.alzheimersresearchuk.org)** or contact us. You can also ask your doctor.

#### Find out more

If you have questions about dementia research or want to find out more about how to get involved in studies, contact our **Dementia Research Infoline** on **0300 111 5 111** or email **[infoline@alzheimersresearchuk.org](mailto:infoline@alzheimersresearchuk.org)**

The Infoline operates 9.00-5.00pm Monday to Friday. Calls cost no more than national rate calls to 01 or 02 numbers and should be included in any free call packages.







## Send me more information

For free information, simply complete this slip and drop it in a post box. Alternatively, phone us on **0300 111 5555**.

### I would like to know more about

Dementia: symptoms, diagnosis, causes, prevention and care ☐

Treatments for dementia ☐

Genes and dementia ☐

The latest dementia research ☐

Title

Name

Address

We would like to keep you informed about our research and our progress in defeating dementia. However, if you do not wish to receive any further communications from us, please tick here: ☐



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## Research

Alzheimer's Research UK  
has funded over  
**£2.8 million**  
of pioneering research into  
early-onset Alzheimer's.

We fund research across the UK. Several studies are looking at the genetics of early-onset Alzheimer's. Another is working with people with early-onset Alzheimer's to follow their health over several years. Our studies are helping to increase understanding of the condition, improve diagnosis and develop potential new treatments.

We believe that dementia can only be defeated through research. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters we hope to fund many more pioneering studies into early-onset Alzheimer's.



# We are the UK's leading research charity aiming to defeat dementia.

We welcome your comments to help us produce the best information for you. You can let us know what you think about this booklet by contacting us using the details below.



## Contact us

Alzheimer's Research UK  
3 Riverside, Granta Park, Cambridge CB21 6AD



## General enquiries

T: 0300 111 5555  
E: [enquiries@alzheimersresearchuk.org](mailto:enquiries@alzheimersresearchuk.org)



## Dementia Research Infoline

T: 0300 111 5 111  
E: [infoline@alzheimersresearchuk.org](mailto:infoline@alzheimersresearchuk.org)

[www.alzheimersresearchuk.org](http://www.alzheimersresearchuk.org)



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