What is Dementia?

Dementia is a broad term that describes a decline in cognitive function, including memory loss, difficulty with communication, problem-solving, and other thinking skills. It is a progressive condition, meaning that it worsens over time.

Types of Dementia

1. **Alzheimer's Disease**: The most common type, accounting for 60-80% of cases.
2. **Vascular Dementia**: Second most common type, caused by reduced blood

flow to the brain.

3. **Lewy Body Dementia**: Characterized by abnormal protein clumps in the brain.

4. **Frontotemporal Dementia**: A group of diseases affecting the front and temporal lobes.

5. **Mixed Dementia**: A combination of Alzheimer's and vascular dementia.

Causes and Risk Factors

1. **Age**: Increased risk after 65.

2. **Family History**: Genetic link.

3. **Lifestyle Factors**: Physical inactivity, social isolation, smoking.

4. **Medical Conditions**: Diabetes, high

blood pressure, stroke.

5. **Traumatic Brain Injury**: Head trauma.

Symptoms

1. **Memory Loss**: Forgetting recent events, learning new information.

2. **Communication Difficulties**: Finding the right words.

3. **Problem-Solving Challenges**: Managing finances.

4. **Mood Changes**: Depression, anxiety.

5. **Personality Changes**: Agitation, aggression.

6. **Disorientation**: Getting lost in familiar places.

7. **Motor Function Decline**:

Coordination, balance.

Stages of Dementia

1. **Early-Stage**: Symptoms are mild and may not be noticeable.
2. **Moderate-Stage**: Symptoms are more pronounced and daily life is affected.
3. **Late-Stage**: Symptoms are severe and daily life is significantly impacted.

Diagnosis

1. **Medical History**
2. **Physical Exam**
3. **Lab Tests** (e.g., blood work)

4. **Cognitive and Neuropsychological Tests**

5. **Imaging Tests** (e.g., CT, MRI)

Treatment and Care

1. **Medications**: Cholinesterase inhibitors, memantine.

2. **Non-Pharmacological Interventions**: Cognitive stimulation, behavioral therapy.

3. **Lifestyle Modifications**: Exercise, social engagement.

4. **Caregiver Support**: Education, respite care.

Self-care

For those diagnosed with dementia, there are things that can help manage symptoms:

- Stay physically active.
- Eat healthily.
- Stop smoking and drinking alcohol.
- Get regular check-ups with your doctor.
- Write down everyday tasks and appointments to help you remember important things.
- Keep up your hobbies and do things that you enjoy.

- Try new ways to keep your mind active.

- Spend time with friends and family and engage in community life.

It is important to recognize that providing care and support for a person living with dementia can be challenging, impacting the carer's own health and well-being. As someone supporting a person living with dementia, reach out to family members, friends, and professionals for help. Take regular breaks and look after yourself. Try stress management techniques such as mindfulness-based exercises and seek professional help and guidance if needed.

## Risk factors and prevention

Although age is the strongest known risk factor for dementia, it is not an inevitable consequence of biological ageing. Further, dementia does not exclusively affect older people – young onset dementia (defined as the onset of symptoms before the age of 65 years) accounts for up to 9% of cases. Studies show that people can reduce their risk of cognitive decline and dementia by being physically active, not smoking, avoiding harmful use of alcohol, controlling their weight, eating a healthy diet, and maintaining healthy blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels. Additional risk factors include

depression, social isolation, low educational attainment, cognitive inactivity, and air pollution.

Prognosis

Dementia is a progressive condition, and the prognosis varies depending on the type and stage. With proper care and support, individuals with dementia can lead fulfilling lives.
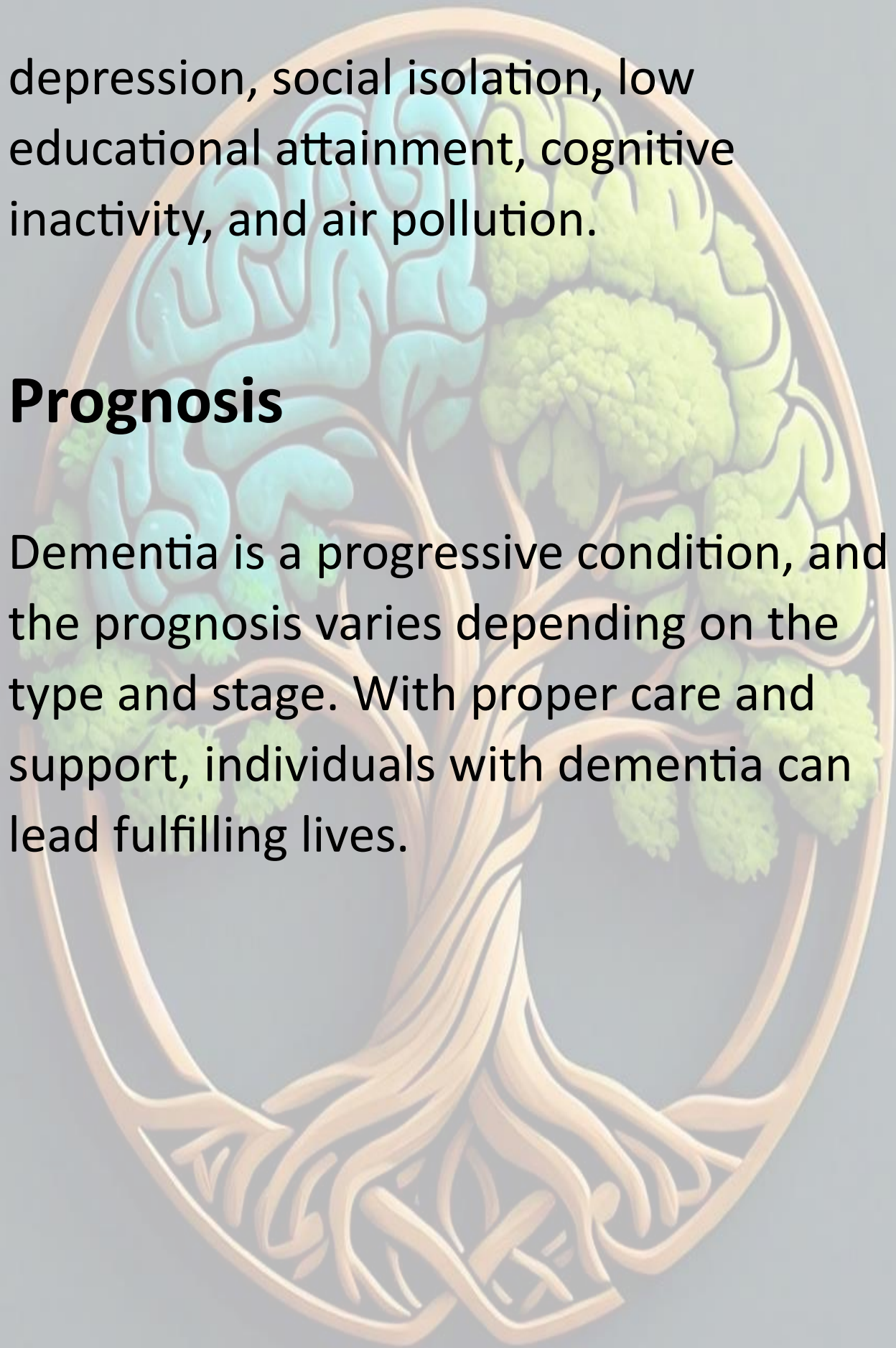
Resources

1. Alzheimer's Association (alz.org)
2. National Institute on Aging (nia.nih.gov)
3. Dementia Care Central (dementiacarecentral.com)
4. World Health Organization (WHO)