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Dementia

Also called: Senility

What is dementia?

Dementia is a loss of mental functions that is severe enough to affect your daily life and activities. These functions include:

- Memory
- Language skills
- Visual perception (your ability to make sense of what you see)
- Problem solving
- Trouble with everyday tasks
- The ability to focus and pay attention

It is normal to become a bit more forgetful as you age. But dementia is not a normal part of aging. It is a serious disorder that interferes with your daily life.

What are the types of dementia?

The most common types of dementia are known as neurodegenerative disorders. These are diseases in which the cells of the brain stop working or die. They include:

- **Alzheimer's disease** [<https://medlineplus.gov/alzheimersdisease.html>] , which is the most common form of dementia among older people. People with Alzheimer's have plaques and tangles in their brain. These are abnormal buildups of different proteins. Beta-amyloid protein clumps up and forms plaques in between your brain cells. Tau protein builds up and forms tangles inside the nerve cells of your brain. There is also a loss of connection between nerve cells in the brain.
- **Lewy body dementia** [<https://medlineplus.gov/lewybodydementia.html>] , which causes movement symptoms along with dementia. Lewy bodies are abnormal deposits of a protein in the brain.
- **Frontotemporal disorders**, which cause changes to certain parts of the brain:
 - Changes in the frontal lobe lead to behavioral symptoms
 - Changes in the temporal lobe lead to language and emotional disorders
- **Vascular dementia**, which involves changes to the brain's blood supply. It is often caused by a **stroke** [<https://medlineplus.gov/stroke.html>] or **atherosclerosis** [<https://medlineplus.gov/atherosclerosis.html>] (hardening of the arteries) in the brain.
- **Mixed dementia**, which is a combination of two or more types of dementia. For example, some people have both Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

Other conditions can cause dementia or dementia-like symptoms, including:

- **Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease** [<https://medlineplus.gov/creutzfeldtjakobdisease.html>] , a rare brain disorder
- **Huntington's disease** [<https://medlineplus.gov/huntingtonsdisease.html>] , an inherited, progressive brain disease
- **Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE)**, caused by repeated **traumatic brain injury** [<https://medlineplus.gov/traumaticbraininjury.html>]
- **HIV-associated dementia (HAD)**

Who is at risk for dementia?

Certain factors can raise your risk for developing dementia, including:

- Aging. This is the biggest risk factor for dementia.
- Smoking [<https://medlineplus.gov/smoking.html>]
- Uncontrolled diabetes [<https://medlineplus.gov/diabetes.html>]
- High blood pressure [<https://medlineplus.gov/highbloodpressure.html>]
- Drinking too much alcohol [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcohol.html>]
- Having close family members who have dementia

What are the symptoms of dementia?

The symptoms of dementia can vary, depending on which parts of the brain are affected. Often, forgetfulness is the first symptom. Dementia also causes problems with the ability to think, problem solve, and reason. For example, people with dementia may:

- Get lost in a familiar neighborhood
- Use unusual words to refer to familiar objects
- Forget the name of a close family member or friend
- Forget old memories
- Need help doing tasks that they used to do by themselves

Some people with dementia cannot control their emotions and their personalities may change. They may become apathetic, meaning that they are no longer interested in normal daily activities or events. They may lose their inhibitions and stop caring about other peoples' feelings.

Certain types of dementia can also cause problems with balance and movement.

The stages of dementia range from mild to severe. In the mildest stage, it is just beginning to affect a person's functioning. In the most severe stage, the person is completely dependent on others for care.

How is dementia diagnosed?

Your health care provider may use many tools to make a diagnosis:

- A medical history, which includes asking about your symptoms
- A physical exam
- Tests of your thinking, memory, and language abilities
- Other tests, such as blood tests, genetic tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetic-testing.html>] , and brain scans
- A mental health evaluation [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/mental-health-screening/>] to see whether a mental disorder [<https://medlineplus.gov/mental-disorders.html>] is contributing to your symptoms

What are the treatments for dementia?




There is no cure for most types of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease and Lewy body dementia. Treatments may help to maintain mental function longer, manage behavioral symptoms, and slow down the symptoms of disease. They may include:

- **Medicines**, which may temporarily improve memory and thinking or slow down their decline. They only work in some people. Other medicines can treat symptoms such as anxiety, depression, sleep problems, and muscle stiffness. Some of these medicines can cause strong side effects in people with dementia. It is important to talk to your health care provider about which medicines will be safe for you.
- **Occupational therapy** to help find ways to more easily do everyday activities
- **Speech therapy** to help with swallowing difficulties and trouble speaking loudly and clearly
- **Mental health counseling** to help people with dementia and their families learn how to manage difficult emotions and behaviors. It can also help them plan for the future.
- **Music or art therapy** to reduce anxiety and improve well-being

Can dementia be prevented?

Researchers have not found a proven way to prevent dementia. Living a healthy lifestyle [https://medlineplus.gov/healthyliving.html] might influence some of your risk factors for dementia.

Start Here

- Dementia [https://familydoctor.org/condition/dementia/?adfree=true] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/demencia-es/?adfree=true]
- Dementias [https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/dementias]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)
- Understanding Memory Loss: What To Do When You Have Trouble Remembering [https://order.nia.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/understanding-memory-loss.pdf]  (National Institute on Aging) - PDF
- What Is Dementia? [https://www.alzheimers.gov/alzheimers-dementias/what-is-dementia] (Department of Health and Human Services)
Also in Spanish [https://www.alzheimers.gov/es/alzheimer-demencias/demencia]
- What Is Dementia? Symptoms, Types, and Diagnosis [https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers-and-dementia/what-dementia-symptoms-types-and-diagnosis]  (National Institute on Aging)
Also in Spanish [https://www.nia.nih.gov/espanol/demencia/demencia-sintomas-tipos-diagnostico]


Diagnosis and Tests

- Cognitive Impairment in Older Adults: Screening [https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/recommendation/cognitive-impairment-in-older-adults-screening] (U.S. Preventive Services Task Force)
- Dementia: Diagnosis and Tests [https://www.healthinaging.org/a-z-topic/dementia] (AGS Health in Aging Foundation)
- Newly Diagnosed with FTD (Frontotemporal Degeneration) [https://www.theaftd.org/living-with-ftd/newly-diagnosed/] (Association for Frontotemporal Degeneration)


Prevention and Risk Factors

- Brain Health [https://www.alz.org/help-support/brain_health] (Alzheimer's Association)
- Brain Training for Seniors [https://familydoctor.org/brain-training-for-seniors/?adfree=true] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [https://es.familydoctor.org/entrenamiento-del-cerebro-para-adultos-mayores/?adfree=true]
- Can I Prevent Dementia? [https://www.alzheimers.gov/life-with-dementia/can-i-prevent-dementia] (Department of Health and Human Services)
Also in Spanish [https://www.alzheimers.gov/es/puedo-prevenir-demencia]

Treatments and Therapies

- 7 Things To Know About Dietary Supplements for Cognitive Function, Dementia, and Alzheimer's Disease [https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/tips/things-to-know-about-dietary-supplements-for-cognitive-function-dementia-and-alzheimers-disease]  (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health)
- Medications for Memory, Cognition, and Dementia-Related Behaviors [https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/treatments/medications-for-memory] (Alzheimer's Association)

Living With






- Finding Dementia Care and Local Services [https://www.alzheimers.gov/life-with-dementia/find-local-services] (Department of Health and Human Services)
Also in Spanish [https://www.alzheimers.gov/es/como-vivir-demencia/servicios-locales]
- Tips for Living Alone with Early-Stage Dementia [https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers-and-dementia/tips-living-alone-early-stage-dementia]  (National Institute on Aging)

Tips for People with Dementia [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/life-with-dementia/tips-dementia>]






(Department of Health and Human Services)


Also in Spanish [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/es/como-vivir-demencia/consejos-demencia>]

Related Issues

- Brain Donation: A Gift for Future Generations [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/brain-donation/brain-donation-gift-future-generations>]  (National Institute on Aging)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/espanol/donacion-cerebro/donacion-cerebro-regalo-generaciones-futuras>]
- Brain Health [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/brain-health>]  (National Institute on Aging)
- Caring for a Person with a Frontotemporal Disorder [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/frontotemporal-disorders/caring-person-frontotemporal-disorder>]   (National Institute on Aging)
- Dementia and Driving [<https://www.caregiver.org/resource/dementia-driving/>] (Family Caregiver Alliance)
- Nutritional Support for People Who Are Dying or Severely Demented [<https://www.merckmanuals.com/home/disorders-of-nutrition/nutritional-support/nutritional-support-for-people-who-are-dying-or-have-severe-dementia>] (Merck & Co., Inc.)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.merckmanuals.com/es-us/hogar/trastornos-nutricionales/apoyo-nutricional/apoyo-nutricional-para-personas-moribundas-o-con-demencia-grave>]
- Planning after a Dementia Diagnosis [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/life-with-dementia/planning-after-diagnosis>]
(Department of Health and Human Services)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/es/como-vivir-demencia/planificacion-diagnostico-demencia>]
- Resources for Caregivers of People with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/life-with-dementia/resources-caregivers>] (Department of Health and Human Services)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/es/como-vivir-demencia/recursos-cuidadores>]
- Sundowning: Late-Day Confusion [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alzheimers-disease/expert-answers/sundowning/FAQ-20058511?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/alzheimers-disease/expert-answers/sundowning/faq-20058511?p=1>]
- Taking a Person With Alzheimer's Disease to the Hospital [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers-caregiving/taking-person-alzheimers-disease-hospital>]  (National Institute on Aging)
- Tips for Caregivers and Families of People with Dementia [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/life-with-dementia/tips-caregivers>]
(Department of Health and Human Services)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/es/como-vivir-demencia/consejos-cuidadores>]

Specifics

- CADASIL [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/cadasil>]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/es/health-information/disorders/cadasil>]
- Frontotemporal Dementia and Other Frontotemporal Disorders [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/health-information/disorders/frontotemporal-dementia-and-other-frontotemporal-disorders>]  (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)
Also in Spanish [<https://espanol.ninds.nih.gov/es/trastornos/demencia-frontotemporal>]
- Kluver-Bucy Syndrome [<https://rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/6840/klver-bucy-syndrome>]  (Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center)
- Parkinson's Disease Dementia [<https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-dementia/types-of-dementia/parkinson-s-disease-dementia>] (Alzheimer's Association)
- Types of Dementia [<https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-dementia/types-of-dementia>] (Alzheimer's Association)
- Vascular Dementia [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/vascular-dementia>]  (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/es/salud/demencia-vascular>]
- What Are Frontotemporal Disorders? Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/frontotemporal-disorders/what-are-frontotemporal-disorders-causes-symptoms-and-treatment>]  (National Institute on Aging)









What Are Frontotemporal Disorders? Dementias That Happen in Midlife [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2023/06/what-are-frontotemporal-disorders>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/que-son-los-trastornos-frontotemporales>]



- What Is Frontotemporal Dementia? [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/alzheimers-dementias/frontotemporal-dementia>]
(Department of Health and Human Services)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/es/alzheimer-demencias/demencia-frontotemporal>]

- What Is Vascular Dementia? [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/alzheimers-dementias/vascular-dementia>]
(Department of Health and Human Services)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/es/alzheimer-demencias/demencia-vascular>]


Genetics


- Cerebral autosomal dominant arteriopathy with subcortical infarcts and leukoencephalopathy: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/cerebral-autosomal-dominant-arteriopathy-with-subcortical-infarcts-and-leukoencephalopathy/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- Cerebral autosomal recessive arteriopathy with subcortical infarcts and leukoencephalopathy: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/cerebral-autosomal-recessive-arteriopathy-with-subcortical-infarcts-and-leukoencephalopathy/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- CHMP2B-related frontotemporal dementia: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/chmp2b-related-frontotemporal-dementia>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- Dementia with Lewy bodies: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/dementia-with-lewy-bodies>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- Frontotemporal dementia with parkinsonism-17: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/frontotemporal-dementia-with-parkinsonism-17>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- GRN-related frontotemporal lobar degeneration: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/grn-related-frontotemporal-lobar-degeneration>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- Inclusion body myopathy with early-onset Paget disease and frontotemporal dementia: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/inclusion-body-myopathy-with-early-onset-paget-disease-and-frontotemporal-dementia>]  (National Library of Medicine)
- Myoclonic epilepsy with ragged-red fibers: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/myoclonic-epilepsy-with-ragged-red-fibers>]  (National Library of Medicine)

Statistics and Research

- Caregivers of a Person with Alzheimer's Disease or a Related Dementia [<https://www.cdc.gov/caregiving/about/>]
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- FastStats: Alzheimer's Disease [<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/alzheimers.htm>] (National Center for Health Statistics)
- Research on Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/taking-action/research-activities>]
(Department of Health and Human Services)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/es/acciones/investigaciones>]
- Scam Susceptibility May Signal Risk for Cognitive Decline [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/scam-susceptibility-may-signal-risk-cognitive-decline>]  (National Institute on Aging)
- Treating Hearing Loss to Help Brain Health [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2023/10/treating-hearing-loss-help-brain-health>]  (National Institutes of Health)
Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/tratar-la-perdida-auditiva-para-ayudar-a-la-salud-del>]

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Dementia [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Dementia%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- Find Clinical Trials [<https://www.alzheimers.gov/clinical-trials>] (Department of Health and Human Services)

Participating in Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias Research [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/clinical-trials-and-studies/participating-alzheimers-disease-and-related-dementias-research>]  (National Institute on Aging)

Journal Articles



References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Namaste Care Family for people with dementia and family-A randomized controlled... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40684251>]
- Article: Achieving Quality and Effectiveness in Dementia Using Crisis Teams (AQUEDUCT): a... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40645946>]
- Article: Creating harmony at home via environmental cueing: A feasibility trial of... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40621818>]
- Dementia -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Dementia%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bedat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Reference Desk

- Alzheimer's: Glossary [<https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/care-options/glossary>] (Alzheimer's Association)

Find an Expert

- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke [<https://www.ninds.nih.gov/>] 
- National Institute on Aging [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/>] 
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/espanol>]

Patient Handouts

- Dementia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000739.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000739.htm>]
- Dementia - behavior and sleep problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000029.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000029.htm>]
- Dementia - daily care [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000030.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000030.htm>]
- Dementia - keeping safe in the home [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000031.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000031.htm>]
- Dementia and driving [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000028.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000028.htm>]
- Dementia due to metabolic causes [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000683.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000683.htm>]
- Mental status testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003326.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003326.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Brain PET scan [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007341.htm>]

Dementia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000739.htm>]

Dementia - behavior and sleep problems [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000029.htm>]

Dementia - daily care [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000030.htm>]

Dementia - home care [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007428.htm>]

Dementia - keeping safe in the home [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000031.htm>]

Dementia - what to ask your doctor [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000216.htm>]

Dementia and driving [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000028.htm>]

Dementia due to metabolic causes [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000683.htm>]

Frontotemporal dementia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000744.htm>]

Mental status testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003326.htm>]

Neurocognitive disorder [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001401.htm>]

Vascular dementia [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000746.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Alzheimer's Disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/alzheimersdisease.html>]

Delirium [<https://medlineplus.gov/delirium.html>]

Lewy Body Dementia [<https://medlineplus.gov/lewybodydementia.html>]

Memory [<https://medlineplus.gov/memory.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Dementia* is the National Institute on Aging [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English [<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/dementia.html>] on *Dementia*

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