

Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease

Understanding the Differences



Alzheimer's
Disease
Research

Although often used interchangeably, Alzheimer's disease and dementia are not one and the same. Dementia refers to a general decline in thinking, reasoning, and/or remembering. Alzheimer's disease, a progressive, terminal brain disorder that has no known cause or cure, is the most common form of dementia, accounting for 60 to 80% of all cases. Keep reading to learn about the differences between Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

What is Dementia?

Dementia is not a disease, but a group of symptoms associated with a decline in thinking, reasoning, and memory. Dementia can also cause changes in behavior. If someone has dementia, they may have difficulty carrying out the daily tasks they have performed routinely and independently throughout their lives.

The two most common types of dementia are Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia, where cardiovascular changes lead to reduced blood flow and therefore energy supply to the brain. Alzheimer's and vascular dementia often occur together. Other types include dementia with Lewy bodies, frontotemporal dementia, mixed dementia, and young-onset dementia. Some conditions and medications can also cause dementia-like symptoms.

If someone appears to be losing mental abilities to a degree that interferes with daily activities and social interactions, consult a doctor.

What is Alzheimer's Disease?

The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, a terminal, degenerative brain disorder with no cure. Alzheimer's ranks as the seventh leading cause of death in the United States, impacting nearly 7 million Americans aged 65 and older.

Alzheimer's disease is characterized by the abnormal accumulation of two proteins, amyloid-beta and tau, in different areas of the brain areas at different times, alongside many other pathological factors.



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Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia, is a progressive, terminal brain disorder that has no known cause or cure.

Research is ongoing to expand our understanding of the biological processes associated with the progressive brain degeneration observed in Alzheimer's. Symptoms can include memory loss, confusion, impaired judgment, personality changes, disorientation, and communication impairments that worsen with time.

For more information on the signs, symptoms, and stages of Alzheimer's disease, download our free brochure, Understanding Alzheimer's Disease, at [brightfocus.org/UnderstandingAlz](https://www.brightfocus.org/UnderstandingAlz).

Diagnosis and Treatment

Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are difficult to diagnose, in part because of the challenges in distinguishing the various subtypes of dementia. Clinicians may use several tools to diagnose Alzheimer's or another type of dementia, including:

- Evaluating any recent history of mental and behavioral symptoms.
- Using specialized tests to evaluate performance on brain functions like short-term memory or problem-solving.
- Conducting a laboratory analysis, including brain imaging and blood tests to detect Alzheimer's biomarkers.

Current treatments do not stop the progression of Alzheimer's disease or reverse its damage to the brain. Clinicians may prescribe medications to address some of the disease symptoms like memory loss, depression, wandering, sleeping problems,



hallucinations, and agitation. Newly identified and approved treatments that target amyloid may help slow cognitive decline but will not cure the disease.

Science is quickly advancing to provide clinicians with innovative tools to detect Alzheimer's disease and related dementias earlier and with greater accuracy. Doing so enables earlier treatment, a critical component to managing symptoms and protecting quality of life for all those affected.

Download our free Alzheimer's Treatments facts sheet at brightfocus.org/AlzTreatments or call us at 1-855-345-6237 to request a mailed copy.

Reducing Risk

Today, there isn't a proven way to prevent Alzheimer's disease. But research suggests making certain healthy lifestyle choices, like staying mentally and physically active and maintaining a nutritious diet, could help reduce your risk and improve your overall health.

Consistently keeping the brain engaged with social activities or problem-solving games, for example, can support brain health. Regular physical activity can also provide health benefits and reduce stress levels. Healthcare providers can help build a tailored plan for each individual's needs.

A diet rich in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables and low in sugar and fat is also important for brain health. Scientists are studying how a healthy diet may reduce risk of Alzheimer's and other dementias.

Caregiving

It takes time to adjust to a diagnosis of Alzheimer's or another type of dementia. A person with Alzheimer's may change dramatically in personality and behavior and eventually no longer recognize their loved ones. These circumstances present many challenges for caregivers, and it will take time for all involved to find acceptance and a path forward. Time is also needed to prepare emotionally, financially, and practically for a progressive and terminal disease.

Get tips for preparing for life after diagnosis in our free brochure, *Managing Stress: Care for the Caregiver*, available to download at brightfocus.org/CareForCaregivers.

Promising Research Findings

Alzheimer's Disease Research, a BrightFocus Foundation program, funds scientists around the world as they pursue innovative research for treatments and a cure for this mind-stealing disease.

One groundbreaking Alzheimer's Disease Research-funded project paved the way for a blood test that measures Alzheimer's-related proteins amyloid-beta and tau. Clinicians can use results from this test to assess and plan future diagnostic testing and treatments.

Other studies include evaluating driving behaviors to predict onset of Alzheimer's, exploring non-invasive strategies like brain stimulation to treat the disease, and investigating existing therapies for other diseases that may hold potential for Alzheimer's treatment.

Free Resources Available

Alzheimer's Disease Research offers free information for those affected by Alzheimer's disease.

Read and download information from our website at brightfocus.org/ADR. You can also request free publications by calling us at 1-855-345-6237.



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22512 Gateway Center Drive
Clarksburg, MD 20871
1-855-345-6637
www.brightfocus.org

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