

# About Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia



## What is Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive brain disorder that impacts memory, thinking and language skills, and the ability to carry out the simplest tasks. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia. Dementia itself is not a disease, but a term used to describe symptoms such as loss of memory, loss of judgment and other intellectual functions. Alzheimer's disease can cause dementia. More than 6.2 million Americans are currently living with Alzheimer's disease.

## What are signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease?

Although each individual is unique, experts have identified common warning signs of Alzheimer's disease, including:

- Memory loss, especially of recent events, names, places and other new information
- Confusion about time and place
- Struggling to complete familiar tasks such as brushing one's teeth
- Trouble finding appropriate words, for example in a sentence
- Difficulties in judging situations
- Changes in mood and personality

## What are the stages of Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's Foundation of America follows the National Institutes of Health's National Institute on Aging in describing the disease in three stages early (mild), middle (moderate) and late (severe).

## Early (Mild)

In this stage, people may:

- Forget words or misplace objects
- Forget something they just read
- Ask the same question over and over
- Have increasing trouble making plans or organizing
- Not remember names when meeting new people

## Middle (Moderate)

- In this stage, people may have:
- Increased memory loss and confusion
- Problems recognizing family and friends
- Continuously repeating stories, favorite wants (e.g., foods, places, songs, etc.), or motions
- Decreased ability to perform complex tasks (e.g., planning dinner) or handle personal finances (e.g., paying bills)
- Lack of concern for hygiene and appearance
- Requiring assistance in choosing proper clothing to wear for day, season, or occasion

## Late (Severe)

In this stage, there is almost total memory loss. The individual may:

- Recognize faces but forget names
- Mistake a person for someone else
- Delusions—such as thinking he/she needs to go to work — may set in, even though he/she no longer has a job.

There is a strong need for holding something close for tactile stimulation, nurturing, companionship and comfort.

Basic abilities such as eating, walking, and sitting up fade during this period; the individual may no longer recognize when he/she is thirsty or hungry and will need help with all basic activities of daily living.

It is important to note that Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of aging, and it is important to look for signs like these that might indicate Alzheimer's disease versus basic forgetfulness or other conditions. With Alzheimer's disease, these symptoms gradually increase and become more persistent, and will need help with all basic activities of daily living.

## Dementia Warning Signs

It's important to see your primary doctor if you or a loved one are experiencing changes in memory, mood, or behavior. Your physician can identify if you or your loved one is exhibiting any warning signs of dementia.

Having a memory problem does not necessarily mean someone has a dementia-related illness. Medical conditions such as stroke, B12 deficiency, hypothyroidism, depression and infections can cause dementia-like symptoms and are treatable if diagnosed. If the symptoms are caused by dementia, an early diagnosis can allow for the opportunity to connect with support, education, and medical treatments.

It is important to remember that many of these things can happen to anyone from time to time. Anyone can forget where they put their keys, have sad days, or forget words occasionally. However, if you notice a pattern of these things happening to someone in your life more frequently, it could be cause to speak to someone like a physician, or to sign up for a free, virtual memory screening from AFA.

It is important to note that the symptoms of Alzheimer's and dementia may present differently in each individual person. AFA recommends a person-centered approach, in which one watches out for these warning signs, and works with a care team to develop an individualized treatment plan.

### Common warning signs of dementia include:

#### 1) Recent memory loss

A person living with dementia may have frequent memory loss, that impacts their ability to function in their daily life. This could include the name of someone they see frequently, where to find an item they frequently use, or many other instances.

#### 2) Confusion of time and place

Individuals living with dementia may be disoriented to time, place and immediate environment. They may not know where they are, why they're there, or how they got there. Perhaps they wake up in the middle of the night and get ready for work, even though they've been retired for years.

#### 3) Difficulty performing familiar tasks

A person living with dementia might have increased trouble while driving and get lost. This could even happen in familiar areas. They may forget the rules of the road, forget directions, or ignore signs on the road. This poses a danger to themselves and to others. AFA offers more resources on driving and dementia [here](#).

#### 4) Problems with language

Someone living with dementia might have issues with following or initiating a conversation. They may become frustrated, discouraged, or distant if they are unable to remember a word they want to say, or understand what another person is saying.

## 5) Decreased or poor judgment

We can all make poor decisions once in a while. A person with dementia might make decisions that negatively impact their wellbeing more frequently and start paying less attention to their daily needs.

## 6) Problems with abstract thinking

It is normal to have difficulty balancing a budget. Someone who has a dementia-related illness might forget what numbers are, or how to add and subtract.

## 7) Forget where they put things

Everyone misplaces their keys or glasses now and then. However, one warning sign for dementia can be that a person might repeatedly put their items in places that they do not belong (e.g., keys in the freezer).

## 8) Changes in mood and personality

Anyone can become sad or moody from time to time. One dementia warning sign can be quick mood changes, such as from calm to anger. They also might start becoming uncomfortable in social situations.

## 9) Loss of initiative

It is normal to not want to do housework, or work tasks. A person living with dementia may no longer initiate things that they once enjoyed. If you find that a person who once loved to be outside no longer wants to leave the house, this could be a warning sign.

Make an appointment with your primary care physician if you are experiencing changes in your memory, mood, and behavior.

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# 10 Steps for HEALTHY AGING

Living a healthy lifestyle becomes even more important for better aging.  
The things we do to keep body and heart healthy—  
nutritious diet, physical activity, and social connections—also can help  
promote brain health and wellness.

**Eat well.**



**Stay active.**

**Learn new things.**



**Get enough sleep.**

**Mind your meds.**



**Stop smoking & limit alcohol.**

**Stay connected.**



**Know your blood pressure.**

**See your doctor.**



**Get a memory screening.**

**Learn More:** [alzfdn.org/10-steps-for-healthy-aging](http://alzfdn.org/10-steps-for-healthy-aging)

# FACTS ABOUT **ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE**

Alzheimer's is a  
progressive brain disorder,  
**NOT** a normal part of aging



**MORE  
THAN**

**6 MILLION  
AMERICANS**  
are living with Alzheimer's



The number of Americans with  
Alzheimer's is projected to surpass  
**14 MILLION** by 2060



**MORE THAN 16 MILLION**  
American caregivers provide  
**OVER 17 BILLION**  
hours of unpaid care

**Connect with information and support.**

**Contact AFA's Helpline**

**Phone:** 866-232-8484 • **Text:** 646-586-5283 • **Web:** [alzfdn.org](http://alzfdn.org)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
National Institutes of Health (NIH)

**AFA**  
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