

DEMENTIA

Did you know?



“Dementia is not a specific disease. It is a descriptive term for a collection of symptoms that can be caused by a number of disorders that affect the brain. People with dementia have significantly impaired intellectual functioning that interferes with normal activities and relationships. They also lose their ability to solve problems and maintain emotional control, and they may experience personality changes and behavioral problems, such as agitation, delusions, and hallucinations. While memory loss is a common symptom of dementia, memory loss by itself does not mean that a person has dementia... Although it is common in very elderly individuals, dementia is not a normal part of the aging process.” (*National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke; <http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/dementias/dementia.htm>*)

Symptoms of dementia may make it harder to help people choose benefits. Learning about dementia can help you understand people’s situations and work with them effectively.

💡 Causes of dementia include:

- **Alzheimer’s disease** (accounts for 50-75% of dementia); see the back of the page for warning signs
- **Vascular dementia** or **Multifarct disease** (a series of small strokes).
- **Lewy body disease** (Lewy bodies are round deposits of damaged nerve cells in the brain; this type of dementia is similar to Alzheimer’s but causes hallucinations and develops faster)
- **Frontotemporal dementia**
- **Parkinson’s or Huntington’s disease**
- **Other conditions that can cause dementia or dementia-like symptoms**, including reactions to medications, metabolic problems and endocrine abnormalities, nutritional deficiencies, infections, poisoning, brain tumors, anoxia or hypoxia (conditions in which the brain’s oxygen supply is either reduced or cut off entirely), and heart and lung problems
- **A combination of Alzheimer’s disease and cerebrovascular disease (mixed dementia)**

💡 The cause of the dementia influences the speed of the decline as well as associated symptoms.

💡 People with dementia often have other symptoms, such as anxiety or aggression, for which they may take medications, or receive mental health services. In addition, they may have co-existing medical conditions for which they take medications.

Fact Sheet

Common signs of dementia

The term “dementia” describes a group of symptoms that are caused by changes in brain function. Dementia symptoms may include:

- Asking the same questions repeatedly
- Becoming lost in familiar places
- Being unable to follow directions
- Getting disoriented about time, people, and places
- Neglecting personal safety, hygiene, and nutrition

People with dementia lose their abilities at different rates.

Source: National Institute on Aging Age Page
(www.niapublications.org/agepages/forgetfulness.asp)

Common signs of Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's disease is associated with the development of plaques and neurofibrillary tangles in the brain's cortex. This type of damage is typically found during an autopsy, but the following behaviors are common signs of Alzheimer's.

- Forgets entire experiences (rather than a part of an experience)
- Rarely remembers an event later
- Is gradually unable to follow written or spoken directions
- Is gradually unable to use notes as reminders
- Is gradually unable to care for himself or herself

Someone with normal age-related memory changes is usually able to perform these tasks.

Source: 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease, Alzheimer's Association website
(www.alz.org/AboutAD/Warning.asp)

Quick tips: Helping people with these symptoms make benefit selections

- Ask people with symptoms of dementia whether they have a family member or caregiver who can participate in the conversation and help ensure that the recommendations are followed.
- Provide information in writing and ask whether there is someone in their life to whom you can send a copy.
- Remember that individuals with some level of intellectual impairment may still be capable of communicating preferences about treatment and services, and their preferences and decisions should be respected.