



## Important Information

- Dementia affects each person differently, with varying symptoms based on the type and progression of the disease.
- Early diagnosis and treatment can help manage symptoms and improve quality of life.<sup>1</sup>
- Behavioral symptoms like agitation and aggression can often be managed with non-drug approaches before trying medications.<sup>2</sup>
- Caregivers are vital in the management of dementia, and support for caregivers is essential for both their well-being and the well-being of the person with dementia.<sup>3</sup>

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Dementia is a broad term used to describe a set of symptoms that affect memory, language, ability to focus, and reasoning skills. It happens when brain cells have trouble working together, which may be caused by things like injury, illness, or other changes in the brain. Symptoms can worsen over time, making it difficult to perform everyday activities. While memory loss is often the first sign of dementia, it's important to understand that dementia is more than just memory problems.

The most common cause of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, but there are other forms as well, such as vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, and frontotemporal dementia.<sup>1</sup> Each type of dementia affects the brain differently.

## How Dementia Can Look Different

One of the most important things to understand about dementia is that it doesn't look the same in everyone. The type of dementia and the part of the brain affected can cause different symptoms in different people. For instance, one person may struggle primarily with memory loss, while another may have more issues with planning or solving problems.

In the early stages of dementia, symptoms may be mild and often go unnoticed. Individuals may become forgetful or have trouble finding the right words during conversations.<sup>2</sup> As the disease progresses, symptoms become more severe. They may start to get lost in familiar places, have difficulty managing finances, or become easily confused. In the later stages, they may lose the ability to perform basic activities like dressing or feeding themselves.<sup>1</sup>

## Treatment and Medications

Although there is no cure for dementia, there are treatments available to help manage symptoms. Early diagnosis and intervention can help slow the progression of the disease and improve the individual's quality of life.<sup>1</sup>

## Non-drug Treatments

Structured routines, physical activity, and engaging in meaningful activities are often recommended before trying medications. Changes to the environment, like reducing noise and clutter, can also help reduce confusion and agitation.<sup>1</sup>

## Behavioral Symptoms and Management

- **Agitation and Aggression:** These behaviors may be triggered by confusion or frustration. Non-drug strategies like creating a calm, predictable environment and using simple communication techniques are often effective.<sup>2</sup>
- **Depression:** Many individuals with dementia experience depression. Antidepressants and talk therapy can help improve mood and provide coping strategies.
- **Sleep Problems:** Sleep disturbances are common in dementia. Encouraging a regular sleep schedule, avoiding naps during the day, and creating a quiet sleep environment can help.<sup>2</sup>

## Medications for Memory and Cognitive Symptoms

There are medications designed to improve cognitive function or slow down the progression of memory loss in people with dementia. Common medications include:

- **Cholinesterase inhibitors** such as donepezil, rivastigmine, and galantamine, which work by boosting levels of a chemical in the brain that helps with memory and judgment.<sup>3</sup>
- **Memantine** is used to treat moderate to severe Alzheimer's and works by regulating glutamate, a chemical in the brain that affects learning and memory.<sup>3</sup>
- **Antidepressants** target symptoms of depression and anxiety
- **Antipsychotics** target hallucinations (hearing or seeing things that aren't real) and agitation, but they can sometimes cause side effects.<sup>2</sup>

## Resources

- Tips for Caregivers: [www.dementiasociety.org](http://www.dementiasociety.org)
- Alzheimer's Association: [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)
- Family Caregiver Alliance: [www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org)
- National Institute on Aging: [www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov)



Go online to find more information and to view the references for this toolkit.

[aapp.org/618510](http://aapp.org/618510)

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