

# Alzheimer's disease

## What is Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive form of dementia. Dementia is a broader term for conditions that negatively affect memory, thinking, and behavior. The changes interfere with daily living. Dementia can have a range of causes, such as brain injuries or diseases. Sometimes the cause is unknown. According to the Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60 to 80 percent of dementia cases. Most people with the disease get a diagnosis after age 65. If it's diagnosed before then, it's generally referred to as "younger onset" or "early onset" Alzheimer's disease. There's no cure for Alzheimer's, but there are treatments that can slow the progression of the disease.



## Alzheimer's facts

Although many people have heard of Alzheimer's disease, it's helpful to know the facts. Here are some key details about this condition:

- Alzheimer's disease is a chronic (long-term), ongoing condition. It is not a typical sign of aging.
- Alzheimer's and dementia aren't the same thing.
- Alzheimer's disease is a type of dementia. Its symptoms come on gradually, and the effects on the brain are degenerative, meaning they cause slow decline.
- Anyone can get Alzheimer's disease, but certain people are at higher risk for it. This includes people over age 65 and those with a family history of the condition.
- There's no single expected outcome for people with Alzheimer's. Some people live a long time with mild cognitive damage, while others experience a more rapid onset of symptoms and quicker disease progression.
- There's no cure for Alzheimer's yet, but treatment can help slow the progression of the disease and may improve quality of life.
- Each person's journey with Alzheimer's disease is different.

## **Symptoms of Alzheimer's disease**

Everyone has episodes of forgetfulness from time to time. But people with Alzheimer's disease display certain ongoing behaviors and symptoms that worsen over time. These can include:

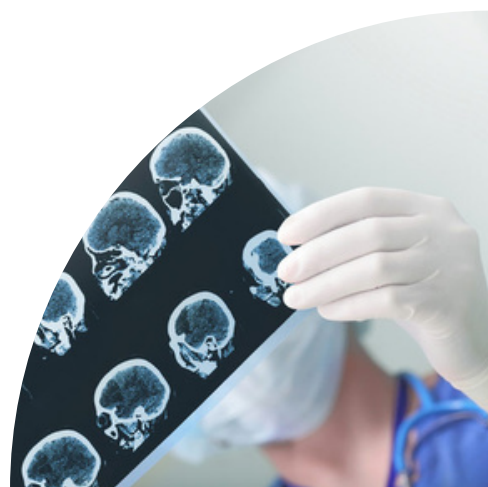
- memory loss affecting daily activities, such as keeping appointments
- trouble with familiar tasks, such as using a microwave
- difficulties with problem-solving trouble with speech or writing
- becoming disoriented about times or places  
decreased judgment decreased personal hygiene
- mood and personality changes
- withdrawal from friends, family, and community.



These signs don't always mean that a person has Alzheimer's. It's important to see a doctor to determine the cause. Symptoms change according to the stage of the disease. In later stages, people with Alzheimer's often have significant trouble with talking, moving, or responding to what's happening around them.

## **Diagnosing Alzheimer's disease**

The only definitive way to diagnose someone with Alzheimer's disease is to examine their brain tissue after death. But a doctor can use other examinations and tests to assess your mental abilities, diagnose dementia, and rule out other conditions. The doctor will likely start by taking a medical history. They may ask about your: symptoms, family medical history, other current or past health conditions current or past medications diet, alcohol intake, and other lifestyle habits. From there, your doctor will likely request several tests to help determine if you have Alzheimer's disease.



## **Alzheimer's tests**

There's no definitive test for Alzheimer's disease. However, mental, physical, neurological, and imaging tests can help your doctor reach a diagnosis. Your doctor may start with a mental status test. This can help them assess your:

- short-term memory
- long-term memory
- orientation to place and time for example, they may ask you what day it is who the president is to remember and recall a short list of words.



Next, they'll likely conduct a physical exam. For example, they may:

- check your blood pressure
- assess your heart rate
- take your temperature
- request urine or blood tests.

In some cases Your doctor may also conduct a neurological exam to rule out other possible diagnoses, such as acute medical issues like infection or stroke. During this exam, they will check your: reflexes, muscle, tone speech.

Your doctor may also order brain imaging studies. These studies, which will create pictures of your brain, can include:

- Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan. MRIs can help pick up key markers, such as inflammation, bleeding, and structural issues.
- Computed tomography (CT) scan. CT scans take X-ray images, which can help your doctor look for abnormal characteristics in your brain.
- Other tests your doctor may do include blood tests to check for genes that may indicate you have a higher risk of Alzheimer's disease.

## **Alzheimer's medication**

There's no known cure for Alzheimer's disease. However, your doctor can recommend medications and other treatments to help ease your symptoms and delay the progression of the disease for as long as possible.

For early to moderate Alzheimer's, your doctor may prescribe medications such as donepezil (Aricept) or rivastigmine (Exelon). These drugs can help maintain high levels of acetylcholine in your brain. This can help the nerve cells in your brain send and receive signals better. In turn, this may ease some symptoms of Alzheimer's.

A newer medication called aducanumab (Aduhelm) is recommended only for those with early Alzheimer's. It is thought to reduce the protein plaques that build up in the brain with Alzheimer's. However, there are some concerns about whether the drug's potential benefits outweigh its risks.

To treat moderate to late stage Alzheimer's, your doctor may prescribe donepezil (Aricept) or memantine (Namenda). Memantine can help block the effects of excess glutamate. Glutamate is a brain chemical that's released in higher amounts in Alzheimer's disease and damages brain cells.

Your doctor may also recommend antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, or antipsychotics to help treat symptoms related to Alzheimer's. These symptoms vary based on the progression of the disease, and can include:

- depression
- difficulty sleeping at night
- agitation
- hallucinations

Although the care needs of a person with Alzheimer's will increase over time, the exact symptoms will be different from person to person.

## **Other Alzheimer's treatments**

In addition to medication, lifestyle changes can help you manage your condition. For example, your doctor might develop strategies to help you or your loved one:

- simplify tasks
- limit confusion
- get enough rest every day
- use relaxation techniques
- create a calming environment.

Along with your doctor, a team of healthcare professionals can help you maintain your quality of life at all stages along the Alzheimer's journey. A care team for Alzheimer's may include a:

- physical therapist, to help with staying active
- dietician, to maintain a balanced, nutritious diet
- pharmacist, to help with monitoring medications
- mental health professional, who may work with the person with Alzheimer's as well as their caregivers
- social worker, to help with accessing resources and support
- respite care center, to provide short-term care for someone with Alzheimer's when their caregivers are temporarily unavailable
- hospice care center, to manage symptoms in a comfortable and supportive setting at the end of life

Some studies have suggested that vitamin E could help slow the loss of functioning in Alzheimer's, especially when taken with medications like donepezil that increase acetylcholine in the brain. But other research found no benefits when taking vitamin E for Alzheimer's disease. Overall, more evidence is needed.

Be sure to ask your doctor before taking vitamin E or any other supplements. It can interfere with some of the medications used to treat Alzheimer's disease. In addition to lifestyle changes, there are several alternative and complementary therapies you can ask your doctor about.

**More materials on <https://www.enso-academy.com/forum>**

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