

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DEMENTIA AND ALZHEIMERS

Dementia and Alzheimer's disease aren't the same. Dementia is an overall term used to describe symptoms that impact memory, performance of daily activities, and communication abilities. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia. Alzheimer's disease gets worse with time and affects memory, language, and thought.

While younger people can develop dementia or Alzheimer's disease, your risk increases as you age. Still, neither is considered a normal part of aging.

Although symptoms of the two conditions may overlap, distinguishing them is important for management and treatment.

Dementia

Dementia is a syndrome, not a disease. A syndrome is a group of symptoms that doesn't have a definitive diagnosis. Dementia is a group of symptoms that affects mental cognitive tasks such as memory and reasoning. Dementia is an umbrella term that Alzheimer's disease can fall under. It can occur due to a variety of conditions, the most common of which is Alzheimer's disease.

People can have more than one type of dementia. This is known as mixed dementia. Often, people with mixed dementia have multiple conditions that may contribute to dementia. A diagnosis of mixed dementia can only be confirmed in an autopsy.

As dementia progresses, it can have a huge impact on the ability to function independently. It's a major cause of disability for older adults, and places an emotional and financial burden on families and caregivers.

The World Health Organization says that 47.5 million people around the world are living with dementia.

Symptoms of dementia

It's easy to overlook the early symptoms of dementia, which can be mild. It often begins with simple episodes of forgetfulness. People with dementia have trouble keeping track of time and tend to lose their way in familiar settings.

As dementia progresses, forgetfulness and confusion grow. It becomes harder to recall names and faces. Personal care becomes a problem. Obvious signs of dementia include repetitious questioning, inadequate hygiene, and poor decision-making.

In the most advanced stage, people with dementia become unable to care for themselves. They will struggle even more with keeping track of time, and remembering people and places they are familiar with. Behavior continues to change and can turn into depression and aggression.

Causes of dementia

You're more likely to develop dementia as you age. It occurs when certain brain cells are damaged. Many conditions can cause dementia, including degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and Huntington's. Each cause of dementia causes damage to a different set of brain cells.

Alzheimer's disease is responsible for about 50 to 70 percent of all cases of dementia.

Other causes of dementia include:

- infections, such as HIV
- vascular diseases
- stroke
- depression
- chronic drug use

Alzheimer's disease

Dementia is the term applied to a group of symptoms that negatively impact memory, but Alzheimer's is a progressive disease of the brain that slowly causes impairment in memory and cognitive function. The exact cause is unknown and no cure is available.

The National Institutes of Health estimate that more than 5 million people in the United States have Alzheimer's disease. Although younger people can and do get Alzheimer's, the symptoms generally begin after age 60.

The time from diagnosis to death can be as little as three years in people over 80 years old. However, it can be much longer for younger people.

The effects of Alzheimer's on the brain

Damage to the brain begins years before symptoms appear. Abnormal protein deposits form plaques and tangles in the brain of someone with Alzheimer's disease. Connections between cells are lost, and they begin to die. In advanced cases, the brain shows significant shrinkage.

It's impossible to diagnose Alzheimer's with complete accuracy while a person is alive. The diagnosis can only be confirmed when the brain is examined under a microscope during an autopsy. However, specialists are able to make the correct diagnosis up to 90 percent of the time.

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Alzheimer's vs. dementia symptoms

The symptoms of Alzheimer's and dementia can overlap, but there can be some differences.

Both conditions can cause:

- a decline in the ability to think
- memory impairment
- communication impairment

The symptoms of Alzheimer's include:

- difficulty remembering recent events or conversations
- apathy
- depression
- impaired judgment
- disorientation
- confusion
- behavioral changes
- difficulty speaking, swallowing, or walking in advanced stages of the disease

Some types of dementia will share some of these symptoms, but they include or exclude other symptoms that can help make a differential diagnosis. Lewy body dementia (LBD), for example, has many of the same later symptoms as Alzheimer's. However, people with LBD but are more likely to experience initial symptoms such as visual hallucinations, difficulties with balance, and sleep disturbances.

People with dementia due to Parkinson's or Huntington's disease are more likely to experience involuntary movement in the early stages of the disease.

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