

Dealing with Dementia

When a disease or condition affects the brain, dementia may result, and the brain's functioning may begin to decline. Dementia is typically caused by a series of small strokes, Alzheimer's Disease or a variety of brain-damaging diseases. Dementia itself is, therefore, primarily a symptom or side effect of specific medical problems. A person suffering from dementia will lose the ability to do things that they once could do easily—like drive a car, read a book, balance a checkbook, have a conversation. This can put a great deal of strain on both the person suffering from the condition and those who care for him or her.

CAUSES OF DEMENTIA

Dementia is not a single disease; rather, it is a large category that includes a variety of causes, some of which are 10 percent to 15 percent reversible. There are a multitude of causes; however, the following are some of its primary causes:

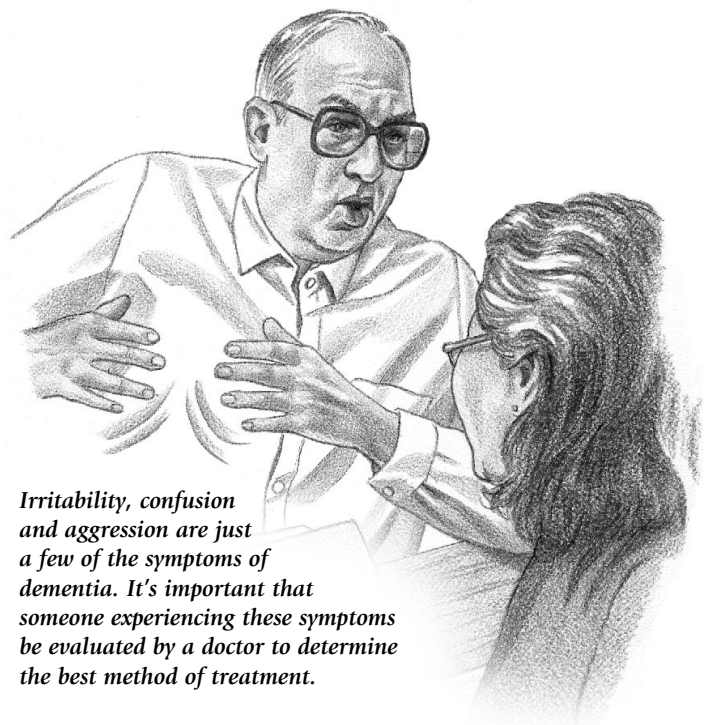
- Alzheimer's disease (accounts for 65 percent of all dementias)
- Strokes
- Drug interactions
- Vitamin B-12 deficiency
- Thyroid conditions
- Depression
- AIDS and other infections

SYMPTOMS OF DEMENTIA

Some of the symptoms of dementia include:

- Memory problems
- Difficulty performing daily duties
- Difficulty communicating and speaking
- Confusion
- Difficulty understanding
- Aggression
- Paranoia
- Depression
- Irritability and agitation
- Sleep disturbances
- Hallucinations

Because of its many causes, it is important that someone experiencing any of the above symptoms be evaluated by a doctor. There are tests available to determine the cause of a person's dementia and the best method of treatment.



Irritability, confusion and aggression are just a few of the symptoms of dementia. It's important that someone experiencing these symptoms be evaluated by a doctor to determine the best method of treatment.

Tips for Caregivers

For people suffering from dementia, agitation and frustration are common. Often, this is a misinterpretation of events, words and people, and a person's response to their inability to do things that once were easy.

Caregivers can help alleviate this agitation by avoiding situations where the person might be unable to do something or unable to remember how to do something. Instead of expecting them to get dressed or eat an entire meal by themselves, you can give them one relatively simple task—slipping on their shoes or buttering their toast—and do or guide them to the rest of the procedure. Experts also recommend that you limit the complicated situations that the person will face—perhaps taking a bath two or three times a week instead of every day, for instance.

Often, people suffering from dementia have some times of day that are worse than others; most dementia patients, for example, become more agitated at the end of the day. You can take this schedule into account when you plan activities, making sure that the most difficult activities are scheduled for the time that the person is most alert and least agitated. Remember that this person can be confused and say things he or she does not mean. Don't take these instances personally.

Recent research suggests that it is best not to be confrontational with a person suffering from dementia, but rather to accommodate them and their sense of reality as much as possible. If the patient wakes up one morning thinking that it is 1942, it is best not to contradict them and insist on the correct date; rather, encourage them to talk about their thoughts, feelings and memories. Your warmth and understanding can help provide that person with a measure of comfort, safety and security.