

Dementia

- Dementia is a syndrome in which there is deterioration in memory, thinking, behaviour and the ability to perform everyday activities.
- Although dementia mainly affects older people, it is not a normal part of ageing.
- Worldwide, around 50 million people have dementia, and there are nearly 10 million new cases every year.
- Dementia is one of the major causes of disability and dependency among older people worldwide.

Signs and symptoms

Early stage: the early stage of dementia is often overlooked, because the onset is gradual. Common symptoms include:

- forgetfulness
- losing track of the time
- becoming lost in familiar places.

Middle stage: as dementia progresses to the middle stage, the signs and symptoms become clearer and more restricting. These include:

- becoming forgetful of recent events and people's names
- becoming lost at home
- having increasing difficulty with communication
- needing help with personal care
- experiencing behaviour changes, including wandering and repeated questioning.

Late stage: the late stage of dementia is one of near total dependence and inactivity. Memory disturbances are serious and the physical signs and symptoms become more obvious. Symptoms include:

- becoming unaware of the time and place
- having difficulty recognizing relatives and friends
- having an increasing need for assisted self-care
- having difficulty walking
- experiencing behaviour changes that may escalate and include aggression.

Treatment and care

There is no treatment currently available to cure dementia or to alter its progressive course. Numerous new treatments are being investigated in various stages of clinical trials.

However, much can be offered to support and improve the lives of people with dementia and their carers and families. The principal goals for dementia care are:

- early diagnosis in order to promote early and optimal management
- optimizing physical health, cognition, activity and well-being
- identifying and treating accompanying physical illness
- detecting and treating challenging behavioural and psychological symptoms
- providing information and long-term support to carers.

Risk factors and prevention

Studies show that people can reduce their risk of dementia by getting regular exercise, not smoking, avoiding harmful use of alcohol, controlling their weight, eating a healthy diet, and maintaining healthy blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels.

Additional risk factors include depression, low educational attainment, social isolation, and cognitive inactivity.