

A Bridge Senior Living Resource



Dementia & Memory Care

A Brief Introduction for Caregivers

Chances are that someone you love – a spouse, a parent, or a close friend – has recently been diagnosed with some form of dementia. Receiving and processing this news can be difficult, fraught with a wide range of emotions and no shortage of questions. As a premier owner and operator of Memory Care communities, we have helped thousands of families navigate this uncharted territory. We hope you find this introductory guide informative, useful, and even a bit comforting as you start down this road. You are not and will never be alone.

– Bridge Senior Living



What is Dementia?

Dementia is a broad term that is used when referring to diseases and other conditions that affect an individual's cognitive abilities severely enough to interfere with daily life. Memory, judgment, and overall thinking are typically impaired, with the impairments growing progressively worse over time.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, but several other forms exist.¹ Vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, frontotemporal dementia, and other variations are generally caused by different underlying issues, but present similar declines in cognitive functions.

Regardless of which form dementia takes, it is important to be aware of early signs and symptoms so that it can be diagnosed and treated as soon as possible. Early diagnosis and treatment can help slow the progression of the condition and improve the quality of life for the person affected.



Symptoms and Stages of Dementia

While declines in memory, thinking, and communication are the most common symptoms of nearly all types of dementia, these and other indicators can vary based on the type of dementia and the stage that it is in, and, of course, from individual to individual.

¹ Unsigned article, (April 2023). Alzheimer's Disease Fact Sheet. National Institute on Aging. Retrieved July 2023 from <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers-disease-fact-sheet>

Stage 1: Early Changes

You may be wondering, aren't certain things like forgetfulness just a part of the normal aging process? Sometimes, yes. But often, mild cognitive impairment along with subtle changes in behavior and personality signal the early stages of dementia, and it pays to not ignore these changes as “merely getting older.” Individuals may have trouble with short-term memory, such as forgetting appointments or misplacing objects. They may also have trouble with language and communication, such as difficulty finding the right words or following a conversation. Other early-stage symptoms may include trouble with decision-making, mood swings, and changes in personality.

Remember, early-stage dementia can be subtle and easily overlooked. While, as with most diseases, early intervention is best, loved ones should not feel guilty if it took a while to suspect something more than “growing old and forgetful” was going on.

Stage 2: Obvious Cognitive Decline

As dementia enters what one would term the middle stage, a person's cognitive decline becomes obvious to all. Significant memory loss and confusion – such as forgetting the names of loved ones or becoming disoriented in familiar settings – occur with greater regularity and severity. Functional impairments also manifest more perceptibly. Tasks such as grooming, dressing, and preparing meals become more and more difficult while increased sleep disruption, agitation, and episodes of wandering also occur.

Stage 3: Severe Cognitive Decline

The later stages of dementia are characterized by severe cognitive decline and functional impairment. Individuals may lose the ability to communicate verbally and may require assistance with all daily activities. It is also not unusual to suffer muscle weakness and difficulty swallowing. Other late-stage symptoms may include incontinence, increased vulnerability to infections, and further changes in personality and behavior.



Most Common Dementia Types and Their Causes

When faced with a dementia diagnosis, it is natural to wonder what caused it to occur. Unfortunately, the answer is not a simple one. In this section, we'll discuss the actual biological factors at play in specific types of dementia. We'll talk about potential contributing risk factors (and how to mitigate them) in section four.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia, accounting for 60-80% of all cases.² After decades of research, the most accepted cause for Alzheimer's within the medical community is a buildup of beta-amyloid plaques and tau tangles in the brain, which interfere with normal brain function and cognitive abilities. The exact cause of this buildup remains unknown, but it is believed to be a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

Vascular Dementia

Vascular dementia is caused by a disruption in the blood supply to the brain, leading to brain damage that results in cognitive impairment. Stroke, high blood pressure, and heart disease are common precursors of this form of dementia.

In 1912, German-born American neurologist Frederic Lewy noticed abnormal protein deposits within brain cells that he was studying. Within a few years it was determined that these deposits, known as Lewy bodies, were a common cause of dementia. The deposits interfere with normal brain function and cognitive abilities. Approximately 1.3 million people in the U.S. currently live with this form of dementia.³



Frontotemporal Dementia

Another common form of dementia – accounting for 10% - 20% of cases according to the Mayo Clinic – is frontotemporal dementia (FTD).⁴ FTD leads to atrophy in the frontal and temporal lobes, resulting in various symptoms depending on the affected brain region. Some individuals experience significant personality changes, often becoming impulsive, indifferent, or even prone to acting inappropriately in social situations. Others may instead struggle with language impairment.

FTD typically occurs at a younger age than Alzheimer's, typically between 40 and 65 years old. Given its symptoms, however, it is sometimes misdiagnosed as an early-onset version of the latter.

² Unsigned article. Dementia vs. Alzheimer's Disease: What is the Difference?. Alzheimer's Association. Retrieved July 2023 from <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/difference-between-dementia-and-alzheimer-s>

³ Unsigned article, (March 2023). Dementia. World Health Organization. Retrieved July 2023 from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/dementia>

⁴ Unsigned article, (November 2021). Frontotemporal dementia. Mayo Clinic. Retrieved July 2023 from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/frontotemporal-dementia/symptoms-causes/syc-20354737>

Risk Factors & Prevention

Dementia is a complex condition. Development can be instigated or exacerbated by a combination of factors, including age, pre-existing medical conditions, lifestyle, and genetics.

As it is with nearly every disease, age is a risk factor in the development of dementia. The older we get, the greater our chances of developing some form of cognitive impairment gets. Approximately 10% of U.S. adults over the age of 70 suffer from some form of diagnosable cognitive impairment. That number increases to 35% for those aged 90 or older.⁵ While there's nothing one can do about aging, there are preventative measures associated with the other risk factors that can reduce its effects.

Pre-existing conditions and certain past environmental exposures both play a role in increasing one's risk of developing dementia. High blood pressure, obesity, and other conditions that continuously stress the body are all factors, as are conditions that result in chronic inflammation such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. Environmental

conditions, including exposure to certain toxins such as lead and pesticides, can also increase one's risk – especially if such exposure was long-term.

As you may have noticed, some of those pre-existing conditions and environmental factors may be influenced by one's lifestyle. For example, smoking contributes to high blood pressure and other ailments along with causing constant inflammation of the lungs. And long-term exposure to detrimental substances is more typically the result of occupational hazards.

Some types of dementia, such as early-onset Alzheimer's disease, are caused by genetic mutations that can be passed down through families. These genetic mutations can cause abnormalities in certain proteins that are essential for brain function, leading to the degeneration of brain cells and the development of dementia. Other genetic mutations, such as those associated with frontotemporal dementia, can affect the structure and function of specific brain regions, leading to changes in behavior, personality, and language.

While genetic mutations are a relatively rare cause of dementia, individuals with a family history of dementia may be at increased risk and should talk to their healthcare provider about genetic testing and counseling.



⁵Jennifer J. Manly, PhD; Richard N. Jones, ScD; Kenneth M. Langa, MD, PhD; Lindsay H. Ryan, PhD; Deborah A. Levine, MD, MPH; Ryan McCammon, MS; Steven G. Heeringa, PhD; David Weir, PhD; (October 2022). Estimating the Prevalence of

Dementia and Mild Cognitive Impairment in the US The 2016 Health and Retirement Study Harmonized Cognitive Assessment Protocol Project. JAMA Network. Retrieved July 2023 from <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamaneurology/article-abstract/2797274>

Treatment & Care

While there is no cure for dementia, a combination of medical treatment and non-pharmaceutical care options can help manage symptoms and greatly improve quality of life.

Several therapies and holistic approaches also exist that complement medical treatment to further slow decline and enhance quality of life. Occupational therapy and physical therapy can help individuals with dementia maintain their independence and perform daily tasks. Speech therapy can help individuals with dementia improve their communication abilities. Music and art therapy can also be helpful in improving mood, reducing agitation, and promoting social engagement.

Other non-medical treatments for dementia include reminiscence therapy, which involves recalling memories and past experiences, and pet therapy, which involves interacting with animals to promote social engagement and reduce agitation.

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia can be challenging, but you don't have to face it alone. Support groups exist in nearly every city, providing caregivers with much-needed support and helping them navigate the guilt and day-to-day stresses that frequently accompany caring for a loved one. At Bridge Senior Living, all the communities we manage offer such support groups, because we know that Memory Care isn't truly comprehensive if it doesn't help the entire family.



Memory Care

In the early stages of dementia, it is common for a family member – be it a spouse or child – to become the primary caregiver for their affected loved one. Of course, not every family is able to take on this responsibility, and even for those who can, the time often comes when the needs of their loved one become too advanced for them to handle alone. Often, the best course of action at this time is to seek residence in a Memory Care community. This provides the best option for those who no longer can live safely in a traditional home setting.

Memory Care communities are specially designed to provide for the total needs of the Memory Care resident. At Bridge Senior Living, we've created specific Memory Care neighborhoods called Lilac Trace. Developed upon the philosophy of Dementia Care expert and author, Mary Ann Drummond, every aspect of Lilac Trace – from the design of the rooms to nutrition management to our Certified Dementia-Capable caregivers – is intentionally centered around the individual resident's journey. Based on Ms. Drummond's award-winning book, *Meet Me Where I Am*, we hope to elevate each and every moment so they can celebrate where they've been and thrive in the here and now.

We know the decision to move to a Memory Care community is not easy. But, knowing your loved one is being treated with a combination of medical care, additional therapies, and compassionate respect they deserve offers both peace of mind regarding their care and easing of stress from trying to do it all yourself.

Many Bridge Senior Living communities provide Respite or Temporary stays, offering a welcome solution for families seeking short-term care for their loved ones who cannot live independently. Whether families are dealing with their own medical situations, traveling, or simply wanting to explore a Memory Care community as a potential long-term option, Respite stays are an excellent choice. It allows families to assess the suitability of a community while ensuring their loved one receives the care they need during their stay.



If you have a loved one dealing with dementia, no matter what stage, we suggest you contact us to explore Memory Care communities within the Bridge Senior Living family – or would simply like more answers to your dementia care-related questions – we invite you to find a memory care community at [BridgeSeniorLiving.com](https://www.BridgeSeniorLiving.com)

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