

# Dementia and Alzheimer's disease

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## Fact Sheet

### What is dementia?

Dementia is a general term associated with a decline in memory, reasoning, and decision making that interferes with everyday activities. It is not a normal part of aging. There are different types of dementia. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia.<sup>1</sup>

### What is Alzheimer's disease (AD)?

AD is a progressive disease in which dementia gradually worsens over time. There are three stages of AD: early, middle, late. In the early stages, memory loss is mild. In the late stage, the ability to carry on a conversation and respond to the environment is more difficult.

For more information about the stages of AD, you can go to:<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/stages>

### How is Alzheimer's disease diagnosed?

There is no single test for AD. Health care providers may notice the early signs and it may take weeks to months for a formal diagnosis. Mental-function tests and imaging may be used to aid in the diagnosis.

### Signs and symptoms of possible Alzheimer's disease:

- Changes in memory
  - Can include confusion about time and place, losing items, difficulty retracing steps
- Difficulty with decision-making
- Difficulty completing tasks that were previously familiar
  - Can include getting lost in familiar places, such as a familiar neighborhood
- Changes in mood or personality
  - Can include withdrawal from family or friends, work or social activities
- Impaired judgement impacting safety
  - Example includes poor safety in the kitchen

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Updated 2023

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## Management of Alzheimer's disease

There is no cure for AD. There are treatments that can temporarily slow the worsening of dementia symptoms and ongoing research to treat the disease and delay or prevent onset. Some general ways to decrease the risk of developing chronic diseases such as dementia include leading a healthy lifestyle, regular exercise, healthy eating, and maintaining social contacts.

## Physical therapy for people with Alzheimer's disease

Physical therapists are trained to use a variety of strategies and treatment techniques to assist individuals with AD. Regular exercise may delay the onset of AD in healthy, older adults, and can improve brain function and memory. For individuals with AD, exercise may slow functional decline.<sup>4</sup>

## Benefits of exercise by stage

- **Early stage:** delay decline of functional abilities by exercising to improve balance, strength, stamina for daily activities, and walking
- **Early and middle stages:** help individuals stay mobile and decrease risk of falls by improving strength and balance
- **Late stage:** help individuals stay active and continue with daily activities as long as possible. Physical therapists can also work with the caregivers and families to improve the individual's safety with mobility and optimize their home set-up.<sup>3</sup>

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## Resources for individuals with Alzheimer's and caregivers

**Alzheimer's Association:** visit <https://www.alz.org> or call the 24-hour helpline at 800-272-3900.

## References:

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/dementia/index.html>
2. <https://www.alz.org>
3. <https://www.choosept.com/guide/physical-therapy-guide-alzheimers-disease>
4. Meng Q, Lin MS, Tzeng IS. Relationship between exercise and Alzheimer's Disease: A narrative literature review. *Front Neurosci.* 2020;14:131.