



Dementia

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a disease where brain cells die in an abnormal way. It is a term used to describe progressive degenerative brain disease. It is not part of normal ageing. The memory, thinking, behaviour and emotions are affected in dementia. It occurs in people of all cultures and educational background. Although there is no cure for dementia, treatments are available to manage the symptoms.



Symptoms of Dementia

- Forgetting dates
- Repeatedly misplacing items
- Repeating questions
- Frequently leaving gas stoves on or water taps running
- Difficulty in finding the right words to express oneself
- Difficulty understanding what people are saying
- Difficulty in performing previously routine tasks
- Getting lost in previously familiar surroundings
- Having trouble driving
- Problems making financial decisions
- Mood changes, including agitation and depression
- Personality changes like behaving inappropriately in social situations

In the early stage, it may be difficult to tell if there is really something wrong. It is common for people affected by Alzheimer's disease (one of the causes of dementia) to deny that they are having problems. Family members may suspect that something is wrong. It is important to get help as soon as possible as medications can have a more beneficial effect when started at an early stage of the disease.



In the middle stage, supervision on certain daily activities is needed. Mood and personality changes may become more prominent and problematic. For example, they may frequently become agitated in the middle of the night or wander off and become lost. Or they may lose their inhibitions, undress in public or make inappropriate sexual advances.

The late stage of the illness is marked by severe cognitive decline. The impaired person is apathetic, disoriented, and unable to find their way around the house. The person may also become incontinent and lose all intelligible speech. Eventually in the late stage, those affected are unable to care for themselves and need help with all aspects of daily life.

What are the causes of Dementia?

There are a number of diseases which cause the symptoms of dementia. All of them cause the death of brain cells. There are many factors which may have an effect on the risk of developing dementia, including age, genes, alcohol and head injury. The two most common causes of dementia are Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia and accounts for 50% - 60% of all cases. It destroys brain cells and nerves disrupting the neurochemicals which carry messages in the brain, particularly those responsible for storing memories. The average duration of the disease usually progresses over a span of eight years from the onset of symptoms.

Approximately 10 million people worldwide are affected by Alzheimer's disease. It is a leading cause of death behind cardiovascular disease and cancer. In Singapore, there were about 3,200 persons with Alzheimer's disease



in the year 2000. The number expected to more than triple to 10,500 over the next 30 years. Most of the people who are affected are over 65, and the chance of developing the disease increases with age. However, in rare cases, Alzheimer's disease can strike people at earlier ages in their 40's and 50's.

The other person affected by Alzheimer's disease is the caregiver. Actually, the stress of caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease often affects the whole family. Family and caregivers experience emotional distress like anger, isolation, anxiety, sleep problems, and depression. There is increased burden and overall distress, as the disease progresses and eventually leaves patients completely dependent upon others. While caring for an Alzheimer's patient may be challenging and difficult, help is available to ease the burden.



Physicians, mental health professionals, caregiver support groups and Alzheimer's associations can provide much needed advice and guidance.

No known cure for the disease exists, but there are newly available therapies indicated specifically for Alzheimer's dementia that slow down symptomatic decline and enhance cognition, activities of daily living and global functioning.

Vascular Dementia

Vascular dementia, formally known as multi-infarct dementia, accounts for about 30% of all cases of dementia.

Vascular dementia occurs where blood vessels in the brain are damaged and the supply of oxygen to the brain is reduced. When oxygen supply fails in the brain, a series of mini strokes (infarcts) occur, causing the death of brain cells. The mini strokes that cause vascular dementia are often so small that they cause no immediate symptoms. Sometimes, they may cause some temporary confusion. However, the damage caused by new mini strokes accumulates over time, resulting in vascular dementia. Vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease can also occur together, acting in combination to cause dementia.

With vascular dementia, mental decline is likely to have a clear start date and symptoms tend to progress in a series of steps following each attack, suggesting that small strokes have been occurring.

What can families do to help a person with dementia?

If a caregiver suspects Alzheimer's disease, seek help from a doctor for assessment, selecting one who specialises in the elderly. Specialised assessment clinics are available in Alexandra Hospital, Changi General Hospital, Institute of Mental Health, National University Hospital and Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

Try to learn more about the disease. There are educational and training classes conducted by voluntary welfare organisations.



Community resources for caregivers

You can also find out about the specialised services available in the community. The Alzheimer's Disease Association provides education and support services to people with dementia and their caregivers. Tsao Foundation provides training and workshops for caregivers. SAGE (Singapore Action Group of Elders) offers a hotline to call for problems concerning the elderly. Day Care Centres catering specifically to dementia sufferers are also available to provide day activity programmes in the community. Examples would be Apex Harmony Lodge, New Horizon Centre, Sunlove Day Centre and Swami Home.

Contact Numbers

Apex Harmony Lodge	10 Pasir Ris Walk (Off Pasir Ris Drive 3) Singapore 518240	Tel: 6585 2265 Fax: 6585 2982
SAGE Counselling Centre	1 Jurong West Central 2 #06-04, Jurong Point Shopping Centre Singapore 648886	Tel: 6354 1191 Fax: 6354 1905
Sunlove Abode for Intellectually Infirm	70 Buangkok View Buangkok Green Medical Park Singapore 534190	Tel: 6387 3548 Fax: 6383 3716
Sunshine Welfare Action Mission (SWAMI) Home	5 Sembawang Walk Singapore 757717	Tel: 6257 6117 Fax: 6754 8443
Tsao Foundation Hua Mei Training Centre	298 Tiong Bahru Road #15-01/06 Central Plaza Singapore 168730	Tel: 6593 9547 Fax: 6593 9556

Alzheimer's Disease Association (ADA)

ADA Resource & Training Centre	70 Bendemeer Road #06-02 Luzerne Singapore 339940	Dementia Helpline: 6377 0700 Tel: 6293 9971 Fax: 6293 3438 Opening Hours: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 6.00pm
ADA (Tiong Bahru)	298 Tiong Bahru Road Central Plaza #03-01 Singapore 168730	Dementia Helpline: 6377 0700 Tel: 6593 6440 Fax: 6593 6444 Opening Hours: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 6.00pm
New Horizon Centre (Bukit Batok)	Blk 511, Bukit Batok Street 52 #01-211 Singapore 650511	Tel: 6565 9958 Fax: 6293 3438 Opening Hours: Monday to Friday 7.30am to 6.30pm
New Horizon Centre (Jurong Point)	1 Jurong West Central 2 #04-04 Jurong Point Shopping Centre Singapore 648886	Tel: 6790 1650 Fax: 6790 1521 Opening Hours: Monday to Friday 7.30am to 6.30pm
New Horizon Centre (Tampines)	Blk 362 Tampines Street 34 #01-377 Singapore 520362	Tel: 6786 5373 Fax: 6784 9587 Opening Hours: Monday to Friday 7.30am to 6.30pm
New Horizon Centre (Toa Payoh)	Blk 157, Toa Payoh Lorong 1 #01-1195 Singapore 310157	Tel: 6353 8734 Fax: 6353 8518 Opening Hours: Monday to Friday 7.30am to 6.30pm

Seeking professional advice?

CGH's Division of Psychological Medicine offers comprehensive psychiatric services. If you wish to book an appointment for psychiatric consultation, please contact our Appointment Centre at **Tel: 6850 3333**.

2 Simei Street 3 Singapore 529889
Tel: 6788 8833 Fax: 6788 0933
Reg No 198904226R

For appointments and enquiries,
please call the CGH Appointment Centre at
Tel: (65) 6850 3333

CGH Appointment Centre operating hours:

8.30 am to 8.00 pm (Monday to Friday)
8.30 am to 12.30 pm (Saturday & Sunday)
Closed on Public Holidays

For more information, please visit
<http://www.cgh.com.sg>



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