



## **DEMENTIA: A Fact Sheet To Share**

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Memory loss that disrupts everyday life is not part of the normal aging process. It is a symptom of dementia, a decline in memory, thinking, and reasoning skills. Dementia is a general term for the loss of an individual's cognitive capabilities. Not too long ago, people called dementia "senility" and they thought it was a natural part of growing old. Now we know that dementia is not a normal part of aging, it is symptomatic of another disease. An estimated 10 percent of people over the age of 65 and 47 percent of people over the age of 85 suffer from dementia. Forty to sixty percent of people with dementia develop psychiatric complications.

Although irreversible forms of dementia such as Alzheimer's Disease (the most common cause of irreversible dementia) do occur with greater frequency in old age, many other cases of dementia are brought on by medical conditions that can be arrested or reversed. There are over 70 different illnesses that can cause or mimic dementia including depression, thyroid disorders, infections, nutritional deficiencies and drug reactions. Signs of dementia such as memory loss, bizarre or unpredictable behaviors and poor judgment should never be dismissed as normal. An older adult exhibiting dementia should be seen by a physician for an appropriate diagnosis as soon as possible.

### **Symptoms of dementia include:**

Difficulty performing familiar tasks: forgetting steps to every day routines, i.e. how to use common items or how to participate in a favorite hobby.

Problems with native language: forgetting simple words, inability to put together a sentence, substituting unusual words.

Disorientation to time and place: getting lost in a familiar places, disorientation to general time of day i.e. thinking it is morning when it is night.

Changes in personality: usually marked by fear, withdrawal, suspicion and blaming of others. Withdrawal from people, social situations and / or activities that they used to enjoy.

*continued*



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### **Symptoms of dementia include:**

Changes in mood and behavior: more rapid and pronounced mood swings, depression, agitation, impulsive or abrupt behavior.

People with dementia can experience depression and anxiety and should be treated for those conditions as well. Often when the depression or anxiety is treated, people with dementia demonstrate a higher level of functioning and mood.

Delirium is a very serious condition marked by a very short attention span, confusion, poor judgment and varied levels of orientation. Delirium is similar to dementia but it usually happens very quickly and is most obvious by a person's inability to remain focused or attentive for any length of time. Delirium is a cognitive and behavioral response to a physical problem in the body i.e. infection, illness, sudden change in physical condition, and medication problem. It requires immediate attention and can be quickly treated with appropriate medical intervention or medication adjustments.