What is dementia?
Dementia is a term used to describe the loss of mental function. Memory loss is its most common symptom. Patients can have problems with speech, understanding and judgment. They may be confused about place and time. Dementia can affect patients’ characters. It can change their moods and behavior. All in all, dementia can make it hard for patients to care for themselves.

What causes dementia?
Most often it is caused by Alzheimer’s disease (AD) and strokes that affect the brain. AD is the cause of 50 to 75% of all cases. Stroke is the cause of 10 to 20% of dementia cases. The rest can be caused by other conditions.

Memory loss and confusion can be brought on by alcohol, depression, side effects of medicine and other illness. It is important to find out if these factors are the cause of memory loss or confusion. If they are found and treated, it may reverse or slow the loss of mental function.

What is Alzheimer’s disease?
AD starts when certain cells in the brain stop working. It begins in the part of the brain that controls memory. As the damage continues, people with AD always get worse. For most, this is a slow process. But for some, it is rapid. People with AD live an average of 8 to 10 years after they are found to have AD. Some live 20 or more years.

The cause of AD is not known. Older age and a family history increase a person’s chance of getting dementia. While there is no cure for AD, there is medicine to slow the disease or improve the symptoms.

What is vascular dementia?
This kind of dementia is caused by a stroke or a series of strokes. A stroke slows or stops the flow of blood to the brain. This may be linked with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and some heart conditions. It may affect different parts of the brain. Stroke differs from AD because it often comes on quickly. And the loss of mental function is sudden as well. The kind of mental damage caused depends on which parts of the brain are damaged.

How do you know if you or someone you care about has dementia?
Dementia must be diagnosed by a doctor. It is the only way to be sure. Your doctor will need to take a full medical history, do a complete physical exam, and order lab tests. Psychological tests and a brain scan may help as well.

Facts about dementia you can use

See your doctor right away-sometimes dementia symptoms may be reversible
Most illnesses that look like dementia get worse over time. But some can be reversed. If the cause of dementia is found and treated, some people can have all or at least part of their symptoms reversed. This is most often true if the causes are depression or medication problems.
Drug treatment for Alzheimer’s disease may delay functional decline
New drugs called cholinesterase inhibitors are used to treat AD. Some adults with early stages of AD who take these drugs improve their memory and some of their thinking. Some are more able to do daily tasks. This class of drugs may also change some behaviors. For example, a person may enjoy being with family and friends again.

Daily routines can help
Treating behavior can help. Caregivers should set up daily routines. It can make the patient’s life less difficult. The home and yard should be checked to make sure it is safe. Patients should take part in things that they enjoy. It may help them do more and be less depressed. Daily activity, like walks and dancing, often help.

Depression increases the decline of mental abilities
Depression is common among patients with dementia. In early stages of AD, depression makes it hard to think clearly and to do everyday tasks. It makes it more likely that a person might have a real behavior change. For instance, a person could become aggressive.

Older adults with both AD and depression can improve when treated with medications. It may make them less upset and angry.

Caregivers need education and support
Taking care of a person with AD is very hard. It puts a great strain on the caregiver. They often get depressed. They may miss work. The burden on the caregiver’s health is a common reason for placing a person with AD in a nursing home.

Family caregivers, who learn about dementia, go to support groups, and get help and counseling are able to cope better. They report a much improved quality of life. This kind of support may help caregivers keep their family member at home for an extra year before needing a nursing home placement.

Questions for you or a family member to ask your doctor
These are questions you can ask your doctor. If you think of any others, write them in the space below.

- How can I tell the difference between just forgetting things and early signs of dementia?
- Have you tested my family member for dementia?
- If a family member or I have memory loss, what tests should be done?
- Should my family member or I take medicine if Alzheimer’s is found?
- Are there treatments that should be started to help behavior problems?
- How will I know if it is working?
- Are there other treatments that you suggest?
- How do I set up a daily routine to help care for my family member?
- How can I tell if my family member is depressed? How should it be treated?
- What is the best way to learn how to be a better caregiver?

Write your questions here:

The information provided here is for educational purposes only, please consult your doctor.
Dementia or Alzheimer’s disease can result in memory loss and confusion that can create challenging problems for the patient and those who care for him/her. Finding solutions to these problems requires working closely with your doctor and other health care providers.

Instructions to the patient:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**Please fill in the answers to the questions on the date of your next appointment. Then, bring this filled out form with you to give to the doctor:**

1. Is the patient having any problems with agitation, trouble sleeping, emotional outbursts, feeling suspicious of those around him/her, depression, or any other problems?
   - ☐ No  ☐ Yes (explain):

   ______________________________________________________________________

2. Does the patient have enough help for personal care and safety?
   - ☐ Yes  ☐ No (explain):

   ______________________________________________________________________

3. Do you, as the caregiver, feel that you have adequate help and support?
   - ☐ Yes  ☐ No (explain):

   ______________________________________________________________________

**Remember:**

If you have any questions about the patient’s treatment or other concerns, do not hesitate to call this office for assistance.
Cognitive Impairment

Resources to call for information about cognitive impairment, home care, adult day care, respite/support programs for caregivers, nursing homes, food and transportation sources.

Alzheimer’s Disease Education and Referral (ADERA) Center
National Institute on Aging
1-800-438-4380
www.alzheimers.org

Eldercare Locator
Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging
1-800-677-1116
www.eldercare.gov

Meals on Wheels Association of America
(703) 548-5558
www.mowaa.org

Alzheimer’s Association
24-hour support line: 1-800-272-3900
www.alz.org

Family Caregiver Alliance
National Center on Caregiving
1-800-445-8106
www.caregiver.org

Resources/Services in My Community:
Address and Telephone

Alzheimer’s Association:

Senior Center:

Senior Day Care:

Meals/food:

Transportation:

Social worker:

Other:
Alzheimer’s Disease
Treatment: Working with the Doctor

What is Alzheimer’s disease (AD)?

AD is a brain disorder that gets slowly worse over time. It damages a person’s memory. It affects thinking and behavior as well. Symptoms and signs of AD can include:

- A gradual memory loss
- Less able to do routine tasks
- Confusion about time and space
- Poor judgment
- Problems learning new things
- Problems with language. They are not able to make themselves understood.
- Change in personality. Not behaving in an appropriate way. Loss of interest in things they used to do. Mood changes.
- Delusions. Seeing things or having false beliefs.

How does the doctor know if it is Alzheimer’s disease?

There is no one test that can diagnose AD. The doctor needs to do a full check-up. This includes:

- An accurate medical and mental health history
- A neurological exam
- Lab tests to rule out low blood counts or other conditions. Tests to see if vitamins are needed.
- Finding out if the person is able to do common daily activities. This could include managing medicines or a checkbook.
- A mental status exam to evaluate the person’s thinking and memory
- An interview with the caregiver

How can you help the doctor?

Bring a list of the medications the person takes to the doctor’s appointment. Make a log of the symptoms or the changes in behavior you have seen. Have a list of questions or concerns. The doctor will need a full medical history. This includes any mental health treatment they have had before.
What can the doctor do if the diagnosis is Alzheimer’s disease?

There is no cure for AD. Yet there are many ways to treat some of the symptoms of the disease. The doctor may suggest that the person:

- Use medicines. They may delay (or in some cases improve) mental decline and memory loss.
- Try some activities. There are exercise and recreation classes. There are also adult day care services.
- Get proper care for medical or mental health problems. This may help a person think more clearly.
- Go to counseling. This will help family members and caregivers. They will learn how to help a person with AD. They can learn how to make a safe environment.

What can be done for behavioral problems?

At times, a person with AD may have behavior problems. They may wander off. They can be paranoid and may not trust others. They may want to argue and fight. They may also not want to bathe, change clothes, or keep themselves clean. All these problems can be too much for the caregiver. The doctor may suggest ways to help. Some of these could be:

- Signing the person up in the Alzheimer’s Association’s Safe Return Program. This is a program to help find adults who have wandered off and are lost.
- Making changes to the person’s surroundings. This helps reduce confusion caused by too much noise, light, and activity in a room or house. Turn off TVs and radios, keep shades down, and make a quiet place for the person.
- Explaining a task before you do it. Say, “I am going to help you put on your shirt.”
- Having a daily routine at home. Have regular times for meals, bathing, exercise, and bedtime.
- Giving comfort to the confused patient. But do not challenge their claims or beliefs even if they are false. Direct their attention to something else.

These methods may not be enough, in which case the doctor may want to use medicines. The caregiver needs to give the doctor detailed information about the problem. This will help guide treatment. They should report when the behavior began. They should report how often and when it occurred and what they have already tried.

How can the doctor help you plan for the future?

Your doctor may suggest you plan for your health care needs by completing an advance directive. It is a legal document. It will direct how future treatment decisions should be made when the patient is not able to decide. The advance directive can explain who should make decisions. It also says what sort of decisions should be made. This is for an individual who is still able to make decisions. The patient signs it while they are capable of making sound decisions.

Adapted from the Los Angeles Alzheimer’s Association.

For more information contact:
Los Angeles Alzheimer’s Association at (323) 938-3379 www.alzla.org
Alzheimer’s Association 24/7 National Contact Center at 1-800-272-3900 www.alz.org

The information provided here is for educational purposes only, please consult your doctor.