

Dementia: Sources, Stages, Symptoms & Solutions

By Ty & Charlene Bollinger

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Each year, around 10 million people are diagnosed with dementia worldwide. But despite its prevalence, it is often misunderstood. While dementia is primarily seen in the elderly, it is NOT a normal part of aging.

What's more, dementia encompasses many different diseases related to cognitive function. With millions impacted, it's important that we understand what dementia is, how it's caused, and what we can do to prevent it.

What is Dementia?

Dementia is not a specific disease, but rather a term used to describe cognitive decline and memory loss that impact daily life. It is not senility, nor is it a normal part of growing old. There are many cognitive diseases classified as dementia, including Alzheimer's disease.

It is a devastating disease that can strike without warning, and which has no cure or treatment. It robs people of their independence, memories, and even personalities. Many patients don't understand what's happening to their minds and can become frightened and combative. Families caring for a loved one with dementia face a tremendous amount of stress and responsibility, particularly the primary caregiver(s).

Unfortunately, many families don't recognize the signs of dementia until later in its progression, often until after the affected family member has been put at risk. Dementia isn't just a simple "senior moment" or a bout of clumsiness. It is a true cognitive impairment that inhibits daily life. Tasks like cooking, cleaning, driving, or even walking can become increasingly more difficult – ***and more dangerous***.

There are too many people who don't understand the disease, which can lead to neglect or even anger as the patient begins to decline.

While there are many types of dementia, all of them stem from degeneration or damage to brain cells. This can lead to trouble remembering or speaking, forgetting where you are or where you were going, or even forgetting those close to you. While dementia can be prevented and its progression slowed, it is a degenerative disease that will ultimately progress as time goes on.

Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia, affects millions. It's estimated that **200,000 Americans under aged 65 have early-onset Alzheimer's**. And while dementia may not be listed as a common cause of death, its complications – like pneumonia, cardiovascular disease, falls, and dehydration – are major risk factors for people with dementia.

To protect ourselves and our loved ones, it's important that we know how to prevent or slow dementia, as well as how to identify it before it reaches advanced stages. First, we need to understand just how dementia works.

What Causes Dementia?

There are many factors that can cause dementia, some of which remain a mystery. But the bottom line is that all of them result in brain cell degeneration, usually in the frontal cortex. As these brain cells die, we begin to see the symptoms of dementia. There is some evidence that dementia can be genetically predisposed, or "run in the family," but in most cases **the causes are environmental and avoidable**.

One of the most common causes is a buildup of plaque in arteries or around brain cells. This restricts blood flow, eventually leading to cell death. Two proteins commonly found in patients with Alzheimer's are *amyloid* and *tau*.

Since different types of dementia tend to have different causes, we will cover them in more detail in the next section. But some of these causes are universal. Specific diseases like Parkinson's can lead to dementia, as well as environmental toxins like [aluminum](#), clogged arteries, or even [thyroid issues](#). Head injuries, infections, metabolic disorders, and [nutritional deficiencies](#) can also lead to dementia.

In these cases, **dementia can be treatable**. Underlying causes of brain degeneration that can be treated before too much damage is done can lead to recovery. But for many, the damage is permanent and degenerative. There is also a link between autoimmune disease and dementia.

Studies have shown a significant link between autoimmune disease and dementia, though the connection has not been fully explored... yet. In the studies, autoimmune disease was shown to increase the risk of dementia by about 20%. In theory, reducing or preventing autoimmune issues could help prevent or reverse some forms of dementia.

Catching the disease early is key, especially when the causes are reversible, like with autoimmune disorders. **Once there is too much neurological damage, the disease will become irreversible.** As we go over the different types of dementia, we will also talk about some of the specific causes.

Types of Dementia

Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, making up about 60%-80% of all cases. Symptoms of Alzheimer's usually begin to appear around age 60 or later, although in rare cases symptoms can begin as young as 30. Although the exact cause is not known, amyloid plaques have been found in the brains of patients.

These plaques are a unique protein that builds up in certain areas of the brain. These proteins destroy the cells that control memory and other cognitive functions. This buildup is due to an imbalance in the production of peptides. If the balance is corrected early enough, Alzheimer's can be avoided. But when the proteins continue to accumulate, patients reach a "point of no return," wherein the neurological damage reaches a level that produces dementia symptoms.

As Alzheimer's progresses, patients begin to lose cognitive function. At first, this can seem like simple forgetfulness, and is often chalked up to old age. But the symptoms of Alzheimer's are not normal and are a sign that something else is out of balance. **The earlier that dementia is caught, the more likely it is that the patient will be able to treat the underlying cause.**

Vascular Dementia

Vascular dementia is the second most-common form of dementia, afflicting about 20% of patients. Vascular dementia is the most preventable form of the disease, because it can only occur when there is a blockage in the arteries. The majority of patients with vascular dementia will suffer a [stroke](#), or even a series of strokes, due to this blockage.

These blockages, especially after a stroke, cut off blood flow to vital parts of the brain. **Without proper blood flow, the cells begin to die.** While the damage (and therefore the dementia) is irreversible, the risk factors leading up to these issues aren't. [Obesity](#), high blood pressure, [diabetes](#), and other cardiovascular issues significantly increase the risk of vascular dementia.

As we've discussed in other articles, **the best way to reduce these risks is through diet and lifestyle** changes. Obesity, hypertension, and diabetes are largely preventable if you get the right nutrition and plenty of exercise. These things are all a part of [healthy aging](#), and will dramatically reduce your risk of stroke, heart disease, and dementia.

Mixed Dementia

Often, Vascular dementia and Alzheimer's can occur together. This is known as mixed dementia. It can be hard to determine which is contributing more to symptoms of dementia, but imbalances in the body are almost certainly to blame. With mixed dementia, symptoms can progress more quickly. Proteins in the brain combined with arterial obstruction can combine to kill cells faster, expediting the damage and cognitive decline.

Alcoholic Dementia

Alcoholic dementia is caused by [excessive drinking](#), which leads to a deficiency in B vitamin absorption. It is also known as Korsakoff Syndrome. Vitamin B deficiency can lead to atrophy of the brain cells. Another factor observed in alcoholic dementia is overall nutritional deficiency, often seen in heavy drinkers. Once again, poor nutrition can lead to an abnormal decline in brain health.

Huntington's Disease

Huntington's disease is another cause of dementia. While Huntington's is known for disrupting motor function, it also causes cognitive decline. Concentration and short-term memory begin to fade, though patients usually remember people and places until the very late stages of the disease.

Traumatic Brain Injury

A traumatic brain injury can also cause dementia. While memory loss has been seen in those who have suffered a concussion or other brain injury, repeated damage can lead to Alzheimer's. Athletes participating in contact sports and people who have been in severe accidents are

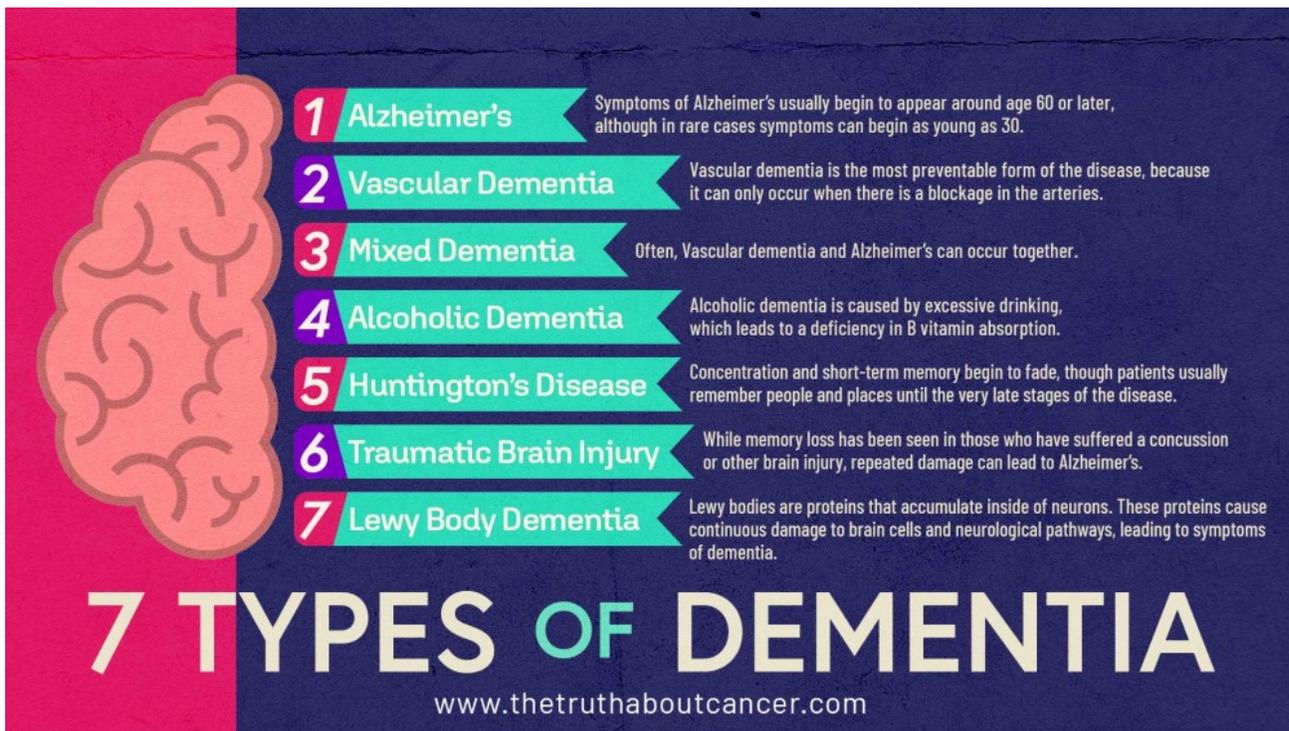
most at risk.

Lewy Body Dementia

Lewy bodies are proteins that accumulate inside of neurons. These proteins cause continuous damage to brain cells and neurological pathways, leading to symptoms of dementia. With Lewy body dementia, patients may begin to have hallucinations that seem very real. It is not uncommon for someone with Lewy body to see and hear things that aren't there.

There are many other types of dementia that are less common, but **they all result in the same thing: brain damage.** Once an individual suffers enough cell death, dementia sets in and symptoms continue to get worse.

It's very important to know that a person with dementia is not "crazy." They are not senile or simply "getting old." They are suffering from a very real disease that is causing cognitive decline. Identifying the stages of dementia can help get patients the help they need before they find themselves in harm's way.



Stages of Dementia

The Global Deterioration Scale, or Reisberg Scale, identifies 7 stages of cognitive decline associated with dementia. While there are many different scales in use, this is the most universally accepted.

Identifying dementia in the early stages is of paramount importance to getting patients the help they need, and potentially reversing the dementia.

Stages 1 – 3

These stages are often categorized as “no dementia,” and symptoms can be hard to detect. Because these symptoms can be observed in otherwise healthy people, it's important to monitor these symptoms to see if they progress or become more frequent.

Stage 1. In Stage 1, the person functions normally without any memory problems. Stage 1 defines people who are mentally healthy, including

people with no dementia.

Stage 2. In Stage 2, the person begins to show normal signs of forgetfulness, such as misplacing keys or forgetting names. These symptoms are extremely subtle, and likely not noticeable if you don't live with the person.

Stage 3. In Stage 3, these symptoms increase in frequency. Patients will begin to have trouble concentrating and will likely demonstrate reduced productivity at work. People in Stage 3 will begin to get lost more often and will have difficulty finding the right words. In Stage 3, the cognitive decline should become apparent to loved ones.

Stages 4 – 6

These stages encompass early- to mid-stage dementia. It is during these stages that issues will become readily apparent, and the patient will need to begin receiving outside help. A person in the middle stages of dementia will become a danger to themselves, so it's crucial that you identify the signs and make necessary arrangements before the person is harmed.

Stage 4. Stage 4 is considered early-stage dementia and is similar to Stage 3. People in Stage 4 will begin to have trouble with short-term memory and problem solving. Managing finances or navigating to a new place will become increasingly difficult. Socialization also becomes harder, as words and names escape them. They may begin to withdraw from friends and family because conversations are becoming too difficult to follow.

Most people with Stage 4 dementia will be in denial about their

cognitive decline. Increased confusion and difficulty problem solving can lead to fear and anger. The person recognizes when something is wrong but does not acknowledge that their mental capacity is diminishing. It's important to be patient, since the person is suffering from brain damage and is likely scared and confused about what's happening.

Stage 5. Stage 5 is the beginning of mid-stage dementia. In Stage 5, the person will begin having more serious memory issues and may need help with daily tasks. They may get confused about the date or time of day, forget their phone number or address, or neglect basic hygiene tasks. In Stage 5, you will begin to encounter safety issues stemming from the dementia. Wandering from the house and getting lost, forgetting to turn off the stove, and difficulty with bathing and cooking is normal.

Those who have progressed to mid-stage dementia should no longer be driving or living on their own if possible. Falls become more common. They may wander off at any time of day and become lost. Many patients are at increased risk of disease because they are unable to properly clean themselves or their homes. They may forget to eat or drink, or how to prepare food.

Stage 6. Stage 6 is when the person will require full-time care, despite insistence that they don't. Short-term memory suffers and remembering names and recent events becomes very difficult. Incontinence also becomes an issue at this later stage, and urinary tract infections become more common.

People in Stage 6 will need help dressing, bathing, and using the bathroom. This is also when personality begins to change more

drastically. A person who was always pleasant may become irritable or even violent. Those who may have had a cranky temperament before can become more docile.

This is an especially difficult stage for families. Full-time caregiving can take a toll, and you begin to see less of the person you once knew.

Stage 7. Stage 7 dementia occurs towards the end of the disease's progression. People in Stage 7 will most likely have no ability to communicate or speak coherently. Motor functions will be severely impaired, and they will need help with nearly every aspect of daily life. Hallucinations can become more common, and the person may not know where they are or even in what year.

Stage 7 occurs as neurological damage reaches its zenith. The person will not remember family members or be able to follow along with a conversation. Some have observed that music can still register, and familiar songs can be soothing.

In Stage 7, the person's brain is beginning to shut down. As breathing and swallowing become more difficult, the body will begin to shut down.

Fortunately, there are ways to prevent dementia, reverse dementia, and slow the progression of dementia, depending on the type. You can care for yourself and your family by arming yourself with the right information.

How to Prevent Dementia

It's important to first emphasize that ***cognitive decline is not a normal part of aging***. It's possible for you to live a long, [healthy life](#) without

losing your mental abilities. With increased wisdom and knowledge, many people may even find that their cognitive abilities have improved. Forgetting where you left your keys or why you went into the kitchen is a normal form of absentmindedness. Be sure not to panic or prematurely diagnose someone over the little things.

Here are 8 ways to prevent dementia naturally:

1 | Remove Stress and Heal Depression

Depression has been shown to be a contributing factor for dementia. Chronic depression or traumatic events can be especially harmful. [Stress](#) and anxiety can lead to memory problems, fatigue, and personality change. Taking time to remove stress from your life will go a long way in the fight against dementia.

2 | Limit Your Medication

In today's [prescription-pad-culture](#), patients are prescribed more medications than ever. Many of these medications can affect mood, memory, and overall health. Those who are older tend to be prescribed even more medicine, since doctors will write a script for blood pressure rather than addressing diet and exercise. These pills can interact, wreaking all sorts of havoc. Be sure to keep track of your medicine and how it affects your body before assuming that you have dementia.

3 | Exercise Daily

There is a strong correlation between physical and mental health. Newton's first law says that an object at rest tends to stay at rest, while an object in motion tends to stay in motion. The human body is no

different. [Regular exercise](#) has been shown to help you stay more alert and to improve critical thinking.

Even more important, ***an active lifestyle can prevent or reverse many of the root causes of dementia***. Blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, cholesterol... these can all be held in check by simply keeping your body moving. Exercise also helps support your immune pathways, which may help prevent or reverse the underlying causes of dementia.

Exercise also keeps the body strong, which will help slow the progression of dementia symptoms. Taking walks or doing some light exercise keeps muscles strong and helps dementia patients remain independent longer

4 | Improve Your Diet

There is a clear link between diet and cardiovascular disease. There's also abundant evidence that nutritional deficiencies are a risk factor for dementia. It's important to find the [diet that's right for you](#), but sticking to organic, whole foods is a great place to start. Using herbs instead of salt to season food can also help. There's a clear link between the body and the mind, and **we are only as healthy as the food that we eat**.

There are also many super foods that can help improve memory and cognitive performance. Leafy greens and [herbs](#) may help prevent or delay the symptoms of dementia.

5 | Do Mental Exercises

Studies have shown that the brain can create new cells throughout your entire life. Just like you go to the gym to strengthen your muscles, it's

important to get plenty of mental exercise to strengthen your brain. Those who don't use their minds as often are actually at a greater risk for dementia.

In today's tech-heavy world, it can be hard to make time for mental exercise. It's easy to turn on the TV or scroll through social media mindlessly and unwind. But that does nothing to challenge your mind and could lead to premature mental decline. Reading, card games, puzzles, and learning are essential.

It's possible that early-stage dementia is reversible if caught early enough. But we have to stimulate our minds and encourage new cell growth in the brain. Even social interactions can be an important part of brain health. Often, older people are left alone all day with little stimulation. Taking time to visit or call each day can help keep their minds sharp and their brains healthy.

6 | Take Your Vitamins

Nutrient deficiency plays a big role in dementia. [Vitamin B12](#), calcium, and [omega 3s](#) have all been shown to reduce the risk of dementia. In some cases, B12 has actually been shown to reverse dementia altogether. Antioxidants have been proven to prevent brain damage in animal studies, adding to your brain health arsenal.

7 | Eliminate Toxins

Our food, water, and air are full of [toxic chemicals](#). While there is little research into their effect on dementia, we do know that they almost all create imbalances in the body, particularly the immune system. **Many of these toxins have been shown to cause permanent intellectual**

damage, which increases the risk of dementia. To protect yourself from the damage these toxins pose, be sure to use a solid water filter, buy organic, non-gmo food, and detoxify regularly. It's also important to look at the medicine we take, since many contain harmful toxins that can hurt our health.

Aluminum is another toxic metal that has been associated with dementia. Aluminum disrupts the blood-brain barrier, causes inflammation in the brain, and damages neurons. Unfortunately, aluminum is everywhere; our tap water, cosmetics, and food all contain aluminum. A 2012 study published in *The Lancet* found that virtually every brain sample tested had high amounts of aluminum.

These levels are even higher in Alzheimer's patients, suggesting that toxins – especially aluminum – may be a contributing cause of dementia.

8 | Reduce Chances of Brain Injury

While car accidents and falls are never planned, there are ways to reduce your risk of brain injury. Wearing protective gear during sports and avoiding anything that causes repeated blows to the head can reduce your risk of dementia. If you do suffer a head injury, see a doctor immediately. You may not know what kind of brain damage has occurred until it's too late.

Can You Reverse Dementia?

Odds are, you or someone you know will suffer from dementia at some point. You could find yourself caring for a parent or spouse, or you could be diagnosed yourself. As always, knowledge is power. Knowing

the risk factors for dementia can help you avoid it. But those with a family member who has already been diagnosed face a different challenge.

We're still learning a lot about dementia. But we know that it isn't a normal part of aging, and we know many of the ways to prevent it. Remember that it's possible to reverse symptoms of dementia if you catch it early enough, so stay vigilant. Most importantly, treat your body like a temple. Emotional stress, poor diet, and injuries are all major risk factors for dementia.

A healthy body supports a healthy mind. If you treat your body and mind right, it'll return the favor.



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Article Summary

- Dementia refers to many different diseases that affect memory and cognition.
- Dementia and other memory loss is NOT a normal part of aging.
- All dementia results in some type of degenerative neurological deterioration, or brain damage.
- There are many causes of dementia, and many of them seem to be preventable.
- Once dementia sets in, it is usually irreversible and progressive. There are 7 stages within this progression.
- Lifestyle changes, detoxification, and mental exercise may go a long way in preventing dementia.