

## **Dementia in Elderly**

Information for Patients/Guardians



### **1. What is dementia?**

Dementia is a condition that usually starts around 60 years of age or later due to shrinking of different parts of the brain.

### **2. How to recognize when dementia is starting?**

During the initial or early stage, dementia causes symptoms such as forgetting recent events for example people may forget who they spoke with one day back, they may ask the same questions repetitively, they may lose or misplace items such as keys, glasses, money. They may forget important events or dates such as appointments, birthdays etc.

### **3. What happens when the dementia starts progressing?**

People may forget words or names, or to take their medications properly, they may get lost while driving, they may have difficulty calculating money or maintaining bank accounts or businesses, they may forget when to pray, and may show personality changes such as not wanting to meet people or socialize, not taking care of personal needs, getting irritable or angry easily, not being able to sleep or sleep too much, or changes in appetite or eating habits.

### **4. What happens at moderate to severe stages of dementia?**

People may become confused, not able to recognize or remember names of family members, lose sense of time, not able to recognize own house, try to leave the house and wander, become suspicious and have delusions such as they may think that people are stealing their money. They may start seeing dead people or may start hearing their voices. At later stages they may have difficulty, walking, swallowing, taking bath independently, or toileting. They may need supervision or assistance to perform daily activities.

### **5. How long does a person live after he is diagnosed with dementia?**

There are different kinds of dementias, however life span of people with typical Alzheimers dementia may be as long as 15-20 years.

### **6. Who develops dementia?**

Certain factors are identified as risks for developing dementia which include old age, female gender, low education, hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol, depression, history of severe head injury, vision or hearing impairment.

### **7. What can we do to prevent dementia?**

Eating healthy diet including more vegetables, fish, fruits, lentils and using olive oil for cooking, exercising 30 minutes a day 5 days a week, eating nuts or dry fruits such as walnuts, almonds, keeping brain active such by reading, doing puzzles, socializing, and avoiding smoking.

### **8. How is dementia diagnosed?**

Dementia is diagnosed by a doctor by testing memory or doing Brain MRI or blood tests if needed.

### **9. Is there any treatment for dementia?**

Once dementia starts such as Alzheimers dementia, it is irreversible. It usually progresses slowly. There is no medicine to cure dementia. But some symptoms can be treated by medication.

### **10. Is there any role of counselling in treating dementia?**

As people with dementia cannot remember information provided, counseling the patient may not be very helpful. However, it is important for family members to know about this condition.

### **11. Is anything other than medication helpful to manage dementia patients?**


Yes, patients need to be engaged with family, they should be involved in activities and socialization, and should be distracted if they become agitated. Listening to music or recitation, walking, and soothing by holding their hands may help them calm down.

### **12. What are the challenges that family members of people with dementia face?**

Family members or caregivers may experience physical and emotional fatigue, depression, anxiety, sleep problems, financial difficulties, and being away as long-distance caregivers.

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