

Is Forgetfulness Just Stress – or a Warning Sign?

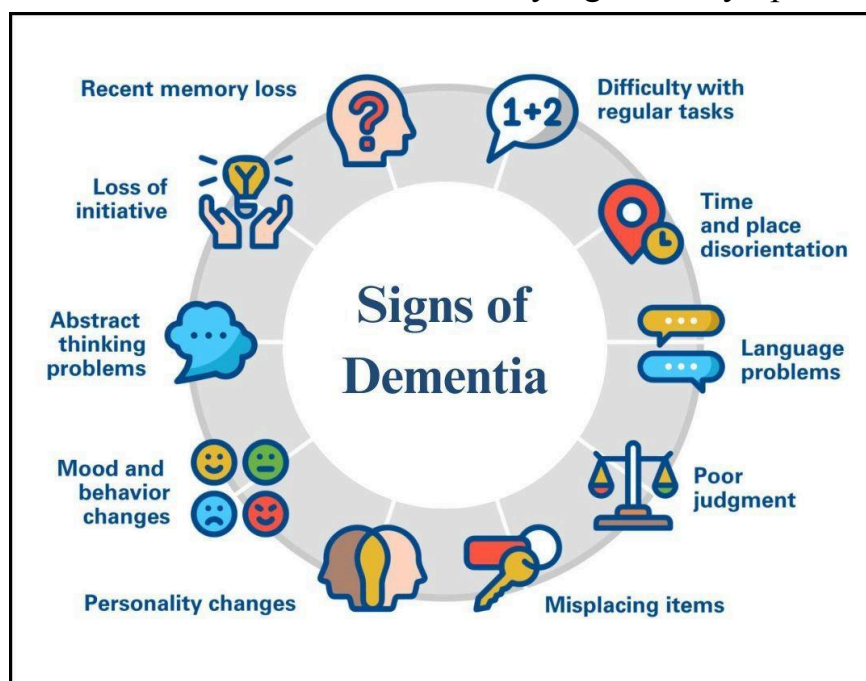
Understanding Dementia

Dementia is a syndrome marked by a progressive decline in cognitive abilities, significantly interfering with a person's ability to perform everyday activities. It is a syndrome that can be caused by several diseases, which over time destroy nerve cells and damage the brain, typically leading to deterioration in cognitive function (i.e. the ability to process thought). Dementia has physical, psychological, social and economic impacts, not only for people living with dementia, but also for their carers, families and society at large.

The prevalence of dementia in India is estimated at 7.4% among adults aged 60 years and above, which translates to about 8.8 million Indians in this age group living with dementia

What are the signs and symptoms of dementia?

Dementia is characterised by a range of cognitive and behavioural symptoms that worsen over time. The most common early signs and symptoms include:



Who is at Risk

Many factors can eventually contribute to dementia. Some factors, such as age, cannot be changed.

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Being aware of these risk factors can help you understand your dementia risk.

- **Age.** The risk of dementia rises as you age, especially after age 65. However, dementia isn't a typical part of aging. Dementia also can occur in younger people.
- **Family history.** Having a family history of dementia puts you at greater risk of developing the condition. However, many people with a family history never develop symptoms, and many people without a family history do. There are tests to determine whether you have certain genetic changes that may increase your risk.
- **Down syndrome.** By middle age, many people with Down syndrome develop early-onset Alzheimer's disease.

Who gets dementia?

Dementia can affect anyone, but some people are at higher risk than others. The main risk factors include:

- **Age:** The risk increases significantly with age, especially after 60 years, though dementia is not a normal part of aging.
- **Having a close relative with dementia or certain genetic mutations** can increase [risk](#).
- **Medical conditions:** High blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, obesity, and a history of stroke or head injury are linked to higher dementia risk

What's the difference between dementia and Alzheimer's disease

- **Dementia** is a general term for a group of symptoms affecting memory, thinking, reasoning, and the ability to perform daily activities. It describes a decline in mental abilities severe enough to interfere with daily life, but it is not a specific disease. Many different diseases can cause dementia, and the symptoms can vary depending on the underlying cause.
- **Alzheimer's disease** is the most common specific cause of dementia. It is a progressive brain disorder that leads to memory loss and cognitive decline. Alzheimer's disease is marked by the presence of abnormal protein deposits (plaques and tangles) in the brain, which damage and kill brain cells over time

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How to Diagnose?

Doctors usually look for an underlying, potentially treatable condition that may relate to psychogenic difficulties. Regular physical exams and blood tests may be conducted to diagnose existing medical conditions. An appropriate medical history can give cues about the familial disposition of dementia.

Can Dementia Be Managed?

Dementia can be managed, but not cured. Management focuses on slowing the progression of symptoms, improving quality of life, and supporting both the individual and their caregivers. Treatment plans often include a combination of medications, lifestyle changes, cognitive therapies, and supportive care.

Is Dementia Reversible?

Most types of dementia are not reversible. However, some conditions that cause dementia-like symptoms, such as vitamin deficiencies, thyroid disorders, certain infections, or medication side effects, can be reversed if identified and treated promptly. For the majority of cases, especially those due to neurodegenerative diseases, dementia is progressive and irreversible.

Providing Emotional Support

Dementia can be frightening and disorienting for the person experiencing it. Providing emotional support is a crucial aspect of caregiving. Simply being there to listen, offering a comforting presence, and engaging in familiar activities can help reduce anxiety and improve the overall well-being of your loved one.

There are many trusted dementia support groups and organisations available that offer valuable assistance to individuals living with dementia and their caregivers. If you or someone you know is affected by dementia, you can reach out to these for guidance and support.

- [Dementia India Alliance \(DIA\)](#)
- [Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India](#)