

## Can you remember anything about 'Dementia'?

Tendency to forget what happened last week, month or year is very common. But, if we fail to recall what we did yesterday, a few hours or minutes back is definitely a matter of concern. Dementia is one such condition that describes a loss of thinking ability, memory, and other mental abilities which are severe enough to interfere with daily life.



## Understanding Dementia

Dementia is a syndrome usually of a chronic or progressive nature that might be expected from normal ageing, in which there is deterioration in cognitive function. It is not a single disease but an overall term that covers a wide range of specific medical conditions, including Alzheimer's disease. The specific medical conditions arising due to dementia are caused by abnormal brain changes that trigger a decline in thinking skills, also known as cognitive abilities, severe enough to impair activities of daily living and independent function. These may also affect behavior, feelings and relationships.

## Characteristics of Dementia

Dementia results when once-healthy neurons or nerve cells in the brain stop working, lose connections with other brain cells, and die. While everyone loses some neurons as they age, people with dementia experience far greater loss. It affects each person in a different way, depending upon the impact of the disease and the person's personality before falling ill.

## Prevalence of Dementia

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), worldwide, around 50 million people have dementia, with nearly 60% living in low- and middle-income countries. Every year, there are nearly 10 million new cases. The estimated proportion of the general population aged 60 and over with dementia at a given time is between 5-8%. The total number of people with dementia is projected to reach 82 million in 2030 and 152 million in 2050. Much of this increase is attributable to the rising numbers of people with dementia living in low- and middle-income countries.

## What causes Dementia?

The brain has many distinct regions, each of which is responsible for different functions. When cells in a particular region are damaged, that region cannot carry out its functions normally. Different types of dementia are associated with particular types of brain cell damage in particular regions of the brain. While most changes in the brain that cause dementia are permanent and worsen over time, thinking and memory problems caused by depression, medication side effects, excess use of alcohol, thyroid problems or vitamin deficiencies.

Some of the other disorders are also linked to dementia like Huntington's disease, Traumatic brain injury (TBI), Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, and Parkinson's disease.

## Prevention of Dementia

Be it any health problem, prevention is always better than cure. Avoiding conditions like smoking, drinking alcohol, maintaining a healthy life and an appropriate body mass index is found to be important. In addition to this, regular exercising especially cardiac and aerobic exercising, and eating healthy food are also pivotal pertaining to prevention. In addition to this managing health problems including diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol, is considered to be important. Staying active socially and mentally also has been considered to play a major role in prevention. This may involve activities like solving puzzles or sudoku.

However, it has to be mentioned that by adapting these measures, it cannot be guaranteed that dementia can be prevented, however to some extent something is better than nothing hence by adapting the above mentioned measures dementia can be prevented to some extent.

## Don't forget, AIISH is here

Medical line of treatment is given as a primary cure for Dementia. Surgical line of treatment is suggested for vascular dementia. Our Speech Language Pathologist would play a major role in treatment providing two lines of treatment. The first line of treatment will be based on the fact that the cognitive deficit affected should be treated directly and this line of treatment is called deficit based strategy. The other strategy called futuristic strategies deals with the adaptation of strategies that may help the person once the condition worsens.

## Conclusion

WHO has recognized dementia as a public health priority as it has significant social and economic implications in terms of direct medical and social care costs. An appropriate and supportive environment can ensure the highest quality of care for people with dementia and their care givers.

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