



# Dementia and Alzheimer's disease

## A closer look

There are some misconceptions about Alzheimer's disease.<sup>1</sup> Even though this type of dementia affects millions of people in the U.S., many of us still don't understand this condition. Let's take a closer look so you learn to recognize the signs and the resources available to you.

### What's dementia?<sup>3</sup>

Before we get to Alzheimer's it's important to know a little about dementia. Dementia is not a disease. It's a word used to describe different symptoms associated with memory decline or other thinking skills that keep a person from completing everyday activities. Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60% to 80% of dementia cases. Vascular dementia, which happens after a stroke, is the second most common type of dementia. Other conditions can cause symptoms of dementia, including some that are reversible, like thyroid problems and vitamin deficiencies.

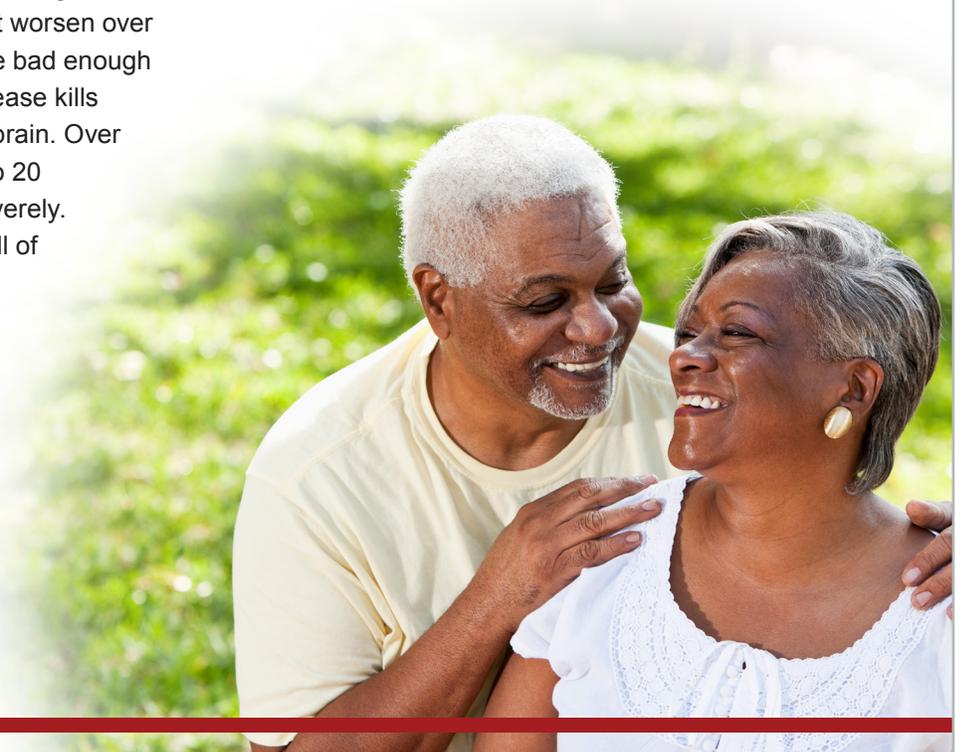
### Understanding Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's disease causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. Signs of the disease often start slowly, but worsen over time. Eventually, they become bad enough to affect daily tasks.<sup>1</sup> The disease kills nerve cells and tissue in the brain. Over time — anywhere from four to 20 years — the brain shrinks severely. That change affects almost all of the brain's functions.<sup>2</sup>



**Find out more  
and get help**

**For helpful tools and information,  
check out the Alzheimer's  
Association's website at [alz.org](http://alz.org).**



## Treatment

There is no known cause for Alzheimer's disease. But there are some factors that can help predict who will get it. For example, age and family history of the disease raise the risk.<sup>4</sup> And while you can't control those things, there are ways to lower your risk:<sup>4</sup>

- Avoid serious head injuries: Use a helmet when you play sports. Wear your seatbelt in the car. And keep floors and staircases clear so you don't fall.
- Take care of your heart: Any disease that harms your heart or blood vessels raises your risk. Be sure to keep your heart healthy. That way, it can keep moving the blood that brings oxygen to your brain.
- Stay at a healthy weight.
- Avoid tobacco and alcohol.
- Make friends so you stay social.
- Exercise your body — and your mind: Do your favorite activities or try new ones.

There are some drugs that can slow down Alzheimer's symptoms and many of the changes in behavior can be treated.<sup>5</sup> The goal is to help keep patients safe and comfortable. If you or a loved one are diagnosed, talk to your doctor about what would work best.



### Sources

- 1 Alzheimer's Association website: Alzheimer's disease facts and figures (accessed November 2017): alz.org.
- 2 Alzheimer's Association website: What Is Alzheimer's? (accessed November 2017): alz.org.
- 3 Alzheimer's Association website: What's dementia? (accessed November 2017): alz.org.
- 4 Alzheimer's Association website: Alzheimer's Disease Risk Factors (accessed November 2017): alz.org.
- 5 U.S. National Institutes of Health website: Treatment (accessed November 2017): nia.nih.gov.
- 6 Alzheimer's Association website: 10 Signs of Alzheimer's (accessed November 2017): alz.org.

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## Recognizing the signs<sup>6</sup>

Keep in mind that signs usually first show up after age 60.

- Memory loss
- Hard time making plans or solving problems
- Trouble with daily tasks
- Confusion with time and place
- Difficulty with images or spatial relationships
- Problems speaking or writing
- Putting things in the wrong place
- Poor judgment
- Not wanting to work or to be social
- Changes in mood or personality

