

UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA & ALZHEIMER'S

WHAT IS DEMENTIA AND ALZHEIMER'S?

Dementia is a general term for health conditions characterized by memory loss, impaired judgement and impaired decision-making abilities. The most common type of dementia is Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's is a progressive disease that worsens memory and cognitive abilities over time. What starts out as mild memory loss may lead to loss of communication skills and the ability to carry out every day tasks.

SYMPTOMS

- Difficulty completing familiar tasks
- Misplacing items more than usual
- Demonstrating poor judgment
- Trouble with sense of balance
- Personality, behavior, or mood changes
- Forgetting recently learned information
- Disruptive memory loss
- Struggling to find words

HOW TO MANAGE DEMENTIA

Currently, there is no cure for Dementia. However, management strategies can be combined with medication to maintain a patient's quality of life:

Treating other health conditions - Depression, diabetes, kidney disease, and sleep disorders can worsen symptoms of dementia. Managing these conditions is important to managing dementia.

Making regular hospital visits - As volatile as behavioral and cognitive symptoms of dementia are, making regular visits allows a professional to note changes in the patient. This way, treatment strategies can be adapted and medications can be modified as needed.

Medication - Some medications can control or delay symptoms, assisting with focus, memory, and communication. Others can help with a patient's emotional health, alleviating depression.

Continuing education for patients and families - Patients and families that understand dementia can better recognize changing symptoms and needs, take on active roles to manage the disease, and adopt effective coping strategies.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR DEMENTIA BEHAVIORS

Troubling Behavior

Combative behavior may be triggered by provision of care, physical discomfort, and stress.

- Try to identify the trigger
- Use a gentle tone and avoid arguing
- Use distraction techniques, like introducing new activities or offering him or her a familiar item to refocus attention
- Remove potential triggers from the environment, such as loud music, distracting TV programs, and flickering lighting.

Preventing Wandering

Patients may wander because of medication side effects, boredom, or because they need to use the restroom.

- Encourage regular exercise to combat restlessness
- Ensure the patient's physical needs are being met
- Place signs that read, "**Stop, Do Not Enter**" or "**Closed**" on doors in the house
- Hang chimes or doorbells on doors, so you are alerted if the patient tries to exit

Difficulty Communicating

Communicating with someone with dementia requires patience, use of body language, and a positive

- Set a positive tone for your interaction
- Avoid distractions by moving to a quiet area
- Maintain eye contact
- Deliver your message in a clear, straightforward manner
- Ask only one question at a time
- Patiently wait for a reply