

Living Well/Aging Well

Dementia



AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION

What is Dementia?

Dementia is not a specific disease but is a general term that describes a set of symptoms caused by conditions or diseases affecting the brain. Symptoms may be different for each person, but may include loss of memory, communication, problem-solving, and other thinking abilities, and changes in mood that are severe enough to interfere with daily life. There are different types of dementia with Alzheimer's being the most common.

Who is at Risk for Dementia?

Risk factors for dementia include age - with most cases affecting 65 years and older; family history; race/ethnicity with older African Americans and Hispanics more likely to have dementia than whites; poor heart health, including high blood pressure and high cholesterol; smoking; and traumatic brain injury including repeated head injuries.



What are the Possible Signs and Symptoms of Dementia?

Dementia symptoms vary depending on the cause. Some common signs and symptoms include:

- **Memory loss that disrupts daily life** - Asking questions over and over again, forgetting recently learned information, and memory changes that affect day-to-day abilities.
- **Difficulty doing familiar tasks** - Forgetting how to do routine tasks.
- **Communication and language changes** - Frequently forgetting simple words, trouble naming a familiar object, or including words that do not fit into the conversation.
- **Decreased or poor judgment** - Changes in judgment or decision-making.
- **Disorientation in time and place** – Getting lost in familiar places.
- **Problems with problem-solving** – Not able to complete more complex tasks.
- **Challenges with vision and spatial information** - Problems with vision, depth perception, and movement.
- **Misplacing things—Not able to retrace steps and putting items in inappropriate places (e.g., placing wallet in the refrigerator).**
- **Changes in mood, personality, and behavior** – Acting differently than is normal for that individual. Having fast mood swings and changes in personality, depression, anxiety, agitation, and being suspicious of others.
- **Loss of initiative** – Becoming passive and not interested in activities. Not wanting to go places or see other people.

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Osteopathic Physicians and the Health Professional Team Care for All Patients' Overall Well-Being

Osteopathic physicians play an integral role in addressing issues that address health and quality of life including for individuals diagnosed with dementia. As trusted sources of health information and guidance, DOs partner with patients to improve physical and emotional health and well-being.

Osteopathic physicians:

- Focus on understanding the patient as a complete individual, addressing the health of the body, mind, and spirit.
- Believe there is more to good health than the absence of pain or disease and provide a holistic and comprehensive approach to treating patients.
- Support each patient in achieving a high level of wellness by focusing on physical and behavioral health and the individual's environment.

What to do if You or a Loved One are Concerned About Dementia

Dementia can be very challenging for the individual and their family and caregivers.

- See your physician if you or a loved one are experiencing dementia symptoms. Only a qualified healthcare provider, after multiple assessments and tests, can confirm whether you or someone you know has dementia.



- In some cases, other conditions may cause “dementia like” symptoms or delirium but are not dementia. These conditions should be treated as soon as possible. They may include high fever, dehydration, vitamin deficiency, poor nutrition, reactions to medicines, problems with the thyroid gland, or a minor head injury.
- Emotional problems and mental health problems in the elderly may also be mistaken for symptoms of dementia.
- It is important to keep the brain healthy throughout all stages of life to possibly help reduce the risk of dementia by reducing blood pressure and cholesterol to recommended ranges, reducing stress, regularly exercising, minimizing alcohol use, quitting smoking, taking a daily multiple vitamin, and getting the recommended hours of sleep each day.
- Medications are available that have been shown to reduce the progression of Alzheimer's Disease. While there is evidence that these medications may be effective,

they are also associated with potential side effects. In consultation with your primary care physician, a physician who specializes in Geriatrics, Neurology, or Psychiatry will help determine whether this medication is appropriate for you.

Resources

[Recognizing Symptoms of Dementia](#)

[Dementia Risk Reduction](#)

[Social Determinants of Health and Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias](#)

[Maintaining Your Brain Health](#)