

# Dementia Fact Sheet

## Definition of Dementia

- (de mens) Latin for “out of mind”
- Permanent loss of multiple intellectual functions
- Alois Alzheimer first described this disease in 1906 in a brain specimen from an autopsy.
- Alzheimer’s disease is one type of dementia, although it is often used synonymously with dementia.

## Epidemiology Of Dementia

- Approximately four million Americans are afflicted with Alzheimer’s disease. In Alabama, over 60,000 people suffer from dementia.
- Approximately 10% of individuals over 65 years, and 47% of persons over age 85 years have dementia. Dementia afflicts both men and women in all racial, religious and socioeconomic groups.

## Typical Symptoms of Dementia

### Intellectual Symptoms

**Amnesia:** Loss of memory function

**Aphasia:** Loss of ability to understand spoken or written word (receptive) and/or the inability to speak (expressive)

**Apraxia:** Loss of the ability to perform remembered motor tasks, for example, buttoning a shirt, turning a door knob, eating or walking.

**Agnosia:** Loss of the ability to recognize sensory messages, e.g., what things look or feel like , or visual agnosia, e.g., the face of a close relative or the feel of car keys.

### Psychiatric Symptoms

- Depression – 25%
- Hallucinations (seeing things) 25%, and Delusions (false beliefs) 30%
- Poor judgement, irritability, inappropriate behavior
- Major personality changes

### Behavioral Symptoms

- Wandering, hoarding, undressing
- Resisting Care, hostility

## Damage Outside the Brain

- Only the brain is damaged by Alzheimer’s disease.
- Other organ systems are not damaged.
- Patients frequently appear quite healthy.

## Reversible Causes of Intellectual Dementia

Five to 20% of the elderly patients who appear demented have treatable diseases such as depression, hormone imbalance (i.e., hypothyroidism) or drug (medication) induced confusion.

### Causes Of Dementia

Dementia is caused by the death of nerve cells. Once a nerve cell dies, it cannot be replaced and its function may be lost. Nerve cell death is caused by many diseases.

#### **Common causes of dementia include:**

- Alzheimer's disease – 60-70%
- Diffuse Lewy body disease 10-20%
- Multiple small strokes – 5-10%
- Multiple other causes – 10-15%

### Causes Of Alzheimer's Disease

**The cause of nerve cell death in Alzheimer's disease is unknown. Inheritance plays some role:**

- Five percent strongly inheritable (autosomal dominant).
- Twenty to 60% of patients may have a genetic vulnerability.
- There is no fool-proof genetic test for Alzheimer's disease.
- Damage may result from accumulation of a toxic brain protein called amyloid.

### Tests for Alzheimer's Disease

- There is no foolproof test that predicts your risk for Alzheimer's disease.
- Diagnosis requires a good clinical history and mental status examination.

### Treatment For Alzheimer's Disease

#### **Prevention:**

- Estrogen therapy may help women after menopause.
- Vitamin E may slow onset.
- Gingko biloba has not been proven to be beneficial

#### **Current Treatment:**

- Early treatment offers some hope.
- Medications slow progression in early stages, (i.e., Aricept, Exelon, and others).
- Psychiatric symptoms usually respond to medication.
- No treatment stops nerve cell death in Alzheimer's disease.

#### **Future Therapy:**

- Future therapy will prevent the death of nerve cells and maximize the function of surviving nerve cells.
- Vaccines may reduce damage from amyloid.
- Brain cell implants offer limited promise.

### The Course of Alzheimer's Disease

- Most patients survive 8-10 years, but can live much longer.
- Each patient has a different mixture of symptoms.
- Patients have long survivals because other organ systems are not damaged.

#### Early Stage (3 to 5 years)

- Mild amnesia (memory loss), good function at home, few psychiatric symptoms.

#### Middle Stage (3 to 10 years)

- Many intellectual impairments, poor function at home, many psychiatric/behavioral problems.

#### Late Stage (3 to 10 years)

- Multiple, severe intellectual impairments.
- Minimal function at home.
- Problems with walking, talking, chewing, and swallowing
- Loss of bowel and bladder function.

### End-Of-Life Care

- Most patients die from complications like infection.
- Quality of life is more important than length of survival.
- Feeding tubes can produce discomfort and complications.
- End-stage patients do very poorly on life-support machines.
- Hospice may be available to help.

### Ways To Protect Your Brain Over Age 65

- Stay mentally and socially active.
- Stay physically fit.
- Control blood pressure and heart disease.
- Visit your doctor on a regular basis.

### Financial Care

- Dementia costs Alabama over 2.7 billion dollars per year.
- Fifty to sixty percent of all nursing home residents are demented. The annual cost of nursing homes care is between \$42,000 and \$50,000 per year in Alabama. Most expenses are paid by patient's families.
- Families provide 70% of the care given Alzheimer's victims. The total cost to society in caring for the AD patient averages \$47,000 per year for each patient.
- Paying for Alzheimer's disease – including cost of diagnosis, treatment, nursing home care, informal care, and lost wages – is estimated to be more than 80 billion dollars each year in America.

** MOST OFTEN CALLED TELEPHONE NUMBERS: **

Alzheimer's Association, North Alabama Chapter (Huntsville)	(256) 880-1575
Alzheimer's Resource Center (Dothan)	(334) 702-2273
Alzheimer's Foundation of the South (Mobile)	(334) 438-9095
Alzheimer's of Central Alabama (Birmingham)	(205) 871-7970
Morgan County Mental Health Association	(256) 353-1160
UAB Alzheimer's Disease Center, Memory Disorders Clinic	1-800-333-6543
Division of Healthcare Facilities--Elder Abuse Hotline	1-800-356-9596
Department of Human Resources – Adult Protective Services	1-800-458-7214
Coalition of Alzheimer's and Related Disorders of NW AL (C.A.R.D) (Florence)	(256) 757-8771
Senior Advantage (Montgomery)	(334) 286-3400
Tuscaloosa County Mental Health Association	(205) 752-2689

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**DEMENTIA EDUCATION & TRAINING PROGRAM MATERIALS**

**VIDEOTAPES: Available in Public Libraries in Alabama**

- Alzheimer's: A Practical Guide to Community Resources
- Alzheimer's: A Practical Guide – Pastoral Care Vol. I&II
- Alzheimer's: A Practical Guide For Sitters – Vol. I&II
- The DETA Brain Series. May be purchased from UA Public Television-1-800-463-8825.

**SCHOOL PROGRAMS ON DEMENTIA:**

- All In Your Mind (High School Videotape produced for a teenage audience with custom teacher guides).
- All In Your Mind (New Middle School Videotape with custom teacher guides). Program available free to Alabama Teachers. May be purchased from UA Public Television-1-800-463-8825.

**FIVE PICTURE BOOKLETS FOR ALABAMA CITIZENS: \***

- "Alzheimer's: A Broken Brain
- "Vascular Dementia: An Explanation of Dementia Caused by Multiple Brain Strokes"
- "Psychiatric Complication of Dementia"
- "Crossing the River of Life with Alzheimer's"
- "Parkinson's Disease: A Disorder of Movement, Mood and Thought"

**POPULAR HANDOUTS FOR ALABAMA CITIZENS**

2060

- Activity Ideas (from A to Z)
- Asking A Dementia Patient to Stop Driving
- Bathing And the Dementia Patient
- Legal Definitions
- Dementia and Driving
- Dental Care and the Dementia Patient
- End of Life Issues
- Financial Decisions and Dementia
- Prevention of Falls in the Dementia Patient
- Recreational Activity for the Dementia Patient
- Ten Questions That Police and Family Should Ask About Driving and Dementia
- Weight Loss in the Dementia Patient
- The Use of Restraints With Demented Patients
- Assessment of Agitation in the Nursing Home Patient
- Pastoral Care and Dementia
- Prevention of Dementia
- AND MANY OTHERS

**Web-site:** [www.alzbrain.org](http://www.alzbrain.org)

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\*Booklets are free to Alabama citizens. Out-of-state individuals may purchase by sending check or purchase order and shipping information to: The University Supply Store, Attn: Jeff Smith, Box 870291, Ferguson Center, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487

**ORDER BY PHONE:**  
(MasterCard, Visa, and Discover Card Accepted)  
Call 1-800-825-6802 (Ask for Jeff Smith)

