

# Information about dementia and support



**This information sheet is for anyone who is worried about dementia or wants to know more about dementia. Help is only a phone call away. Go to [www.alzheimers.org.nz](http://www.alzheimers.org.nz) or ring 0800 004 001 for more information and support.**

## What is dementia?

Dementia is a term used to describe symptoms (the experience of a physical or mental problem) caused by changes in how our brains work. Alzheimers disease is the most common type of dementia.

Anyone can get dementia. As people get older, the chance of getting dementia increases.

The most common symptoms are changes in memory, thinking, behaviour, personality, and emotions. These symptoms get worse as brain changes increase.

Dementia is different for everyone – what is experienced, and how fast the changes occur.

## Early symptoms

The early signs and symptoms of dementia can be hard to notice. Many illnesses can cause dementia-like symptoms. Some of these illnesses are treatable. That is why you should see your doctor or health care provider if you are worried.

Finding out if you have dementia means you can get help earlier. You can get support, information, medication, and time to plan.

## Memory lapses versus memory loss

It is important to understand what is dementia and what is not dementia. We all forget things as we get older. This does not mean we are getting dementia.

Examples of warning signs of dementia can include:

- Recent memory loss that causes problems in daily life
- Difficulty performing regular tasks such as cooking a meal or managing bills
- Problems with language
- Decreased or poor judgment
- Changes in mood and behaviour such as being more easily upset in new situations

## Forms of dementia

Two of the most common forms of dementia are:

- **Alzheimer's disease**

This is the most common form of dementia. Around two-thirds of people with dementia have Alzheimer's disease. Changes seen in the brain include shrinkage and a build-up of abnormal proteins (plaques and tangles).

- **Vascular dementia**

This is the second most common form of dementia. It is caused by poor blood supply to the brain. The symptoms can begin suddenly after a stroke or slowly as disease in the blood vessels worsens.

## Family links with dementia

Some forms of dementia can have family links. About a third of people with Alzheimer's disease have or had a close relative (parent, brother, or sister) with dementia. The dementia is not always inherited and for many people there's no family history.

For any concerns about a family history of dementia, talk to your doctor. Many treatable conditions can cause memory lapses, confusion, and forgetfulness.

## Information and support

If you are concerned that you, or someone you know, may have dementia, talk to your doctor or your healthcare provider.

If you find out you have dementia, help is available. Alzheimers NZ has many resources about dementia. These resources cover many questions that you may have.

The booklet **About Dementia: A guide for people diagnosed with dementia** provides information on:

- What dementia is
- The early warning signs and diagnosis
- Brain health and risk reduction
- What support is available
- Future planning

This information sheet provides a general summary only and is not a substitute for informed professional advice. Any person with dementia or memory loss (including family/whānau and other who provide support) should seek professional advice about their individual situation. Alzheimers New Zealand is not liable for any error or omission in this publication, as a result of negligence or otherwise. This information sheet was produced in 2023.

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