



American  
Society  
**on Aging**

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# Understanding & Overcoming the Challenges of an Alzheimer's Diagnosis

presented by

**Lakelyn Hogan, Ph.D.**  
Gerontologist and Caregiver Advocate

# Presenter

**Lakelyn Hogan, Ph.D.**

Gerontologist and Caregiver Advocate

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# Objectives

01

Review 10 warning signs of Alzheimer's disease and the importance of diagnosis.

02

Discuss challenges of early detection and planning.

03

Learn communication strategies to overcome challenges of an Alzheimer's diagnosis.

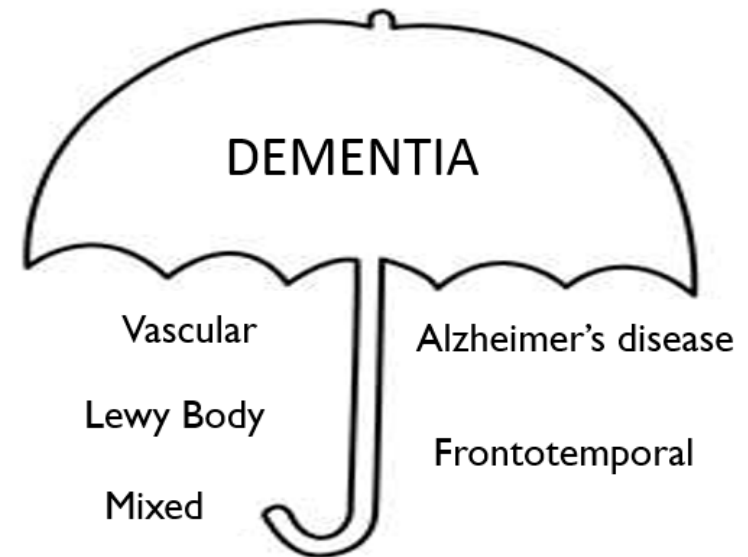
04

Discover resources for professionals and families for diagnosis, care and support.

# Dementia Basics

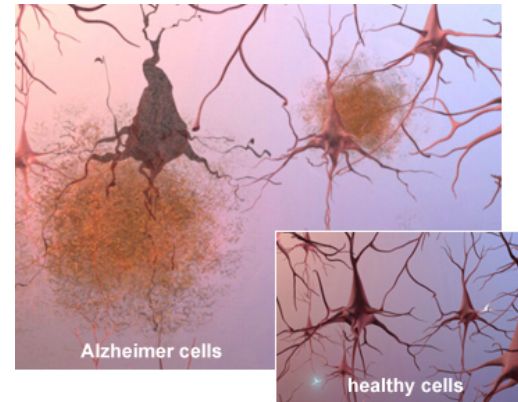
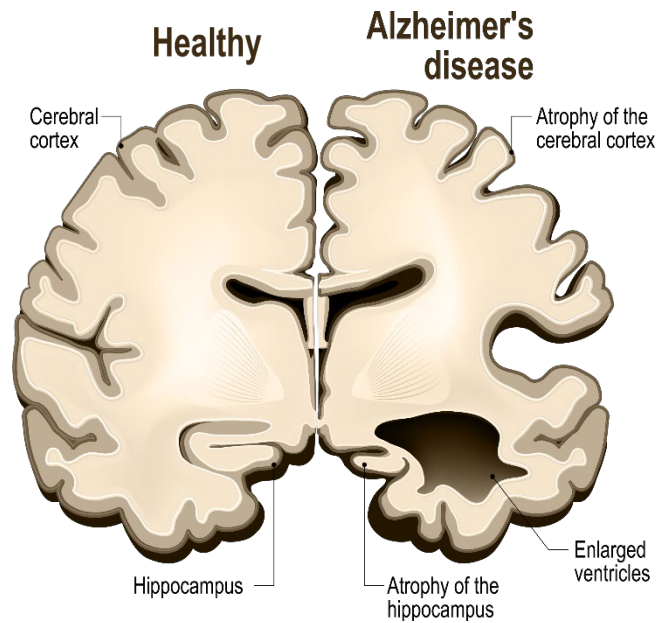
Dementia is a decline in mental ability severe enough to interfere with daily life.

It is not a part of normal aging.



# Alzheimer's Disease

Develops due to microscopic changes in the brain over time.



# STAGES OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

## Early

- Function independently for the most part
- May need extra reminders or verbal/non-verbal cues

## Middle

- Changes in behavior
- More assistance needed for daily care needs
- Communication challenges

## Late

- Decline in physical health
- Difficulty eating and swallowing
- Ability to communicate is limited

# 10 Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life.
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems.
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks.
4. Confusion with time or place.
5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.





# 10 Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

6. New problems with words in speaking or writing.
7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps.
8. Decreased or poor judgment.
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities.
10. Changes in mood and personality.



# Importance of Early Detection, Diagnosis and Planning

- Can rule out other conditions
- Allows for legal, financial and care planning
- Ensures the voice of the person with dementia will be heard
- Makes wishes known to care team which may reduce feelings of guilt, ambiguity and sadness
- Encourages person living with dementia to see a specialist and possibly participate in a clinical trial, thus increasing the speed of receiving treatment
- Economic benefits of planning ahead

# Challenges of Diagnosis

- For the individual with cognitive issues:
  - Lack of awareness of memory problems
  - Fear of the unknown
  - Denial of the issue
- For the healthcare provider:
  - Limited treatment options, no cure
  - Anticipated emotional distress of patient
  - Lack of awareness of community resources and supports
  - Availability of specialists, especially in rural communities
- Stigma associated with dementia
- Family's reluctance to encourage a diagnosis





# Challenges of Diagnosis

- **30%** would not talk to a relative about troubling signs of dementia, despite their worries
- **76%** concerned about “offending” a family member
- **69%** concerned about “ruining [their] relationship” with that person
- **38%** would wait to talk to their loved one until symptoms worsened



# Having the Conversation

- Collect detailed information
  - Know the signs
  - Look for patterns
- Do not delay the conversation
- Plan what you are going to say
- Pick a comfortable time and place to talk
- Explain your concern
- Encourage a dialogue

# Having the Conversation

- Involve healthcare provider, social worker or other family member if necessary
- Create a positive plan of action
- Reach out for professional help
- Don't be discouraged if the process takes time

# Getting the Diagnosis

- Cognitive screening is part of the Medicare Annual Wellness Visit
- Be prepared to discuss symptoms:
  - What kind of symptoms have you noticed?
  - When did they begin?
  - How often do they happen?
  - Have they gotten worse?





# Getting the Diagnosis

- Possible referral to specialist
- Diagnostic process is likely to include:
  - Medical history
  - Physical exam and diagnostic tests
  - Neurological exam
  - Mental status test
  - Brain imaging





# Overcoming Denial

- Remain calm when talking to the person
- Give the person time and space to think about their diagnosis
- Keep a diary of events (examples of issues, dates, times, locations)
- Learn about local support groups to talk with others about diagnosis
- Look into options for therapy (professional counseling or art therapy)
- Suggest talking further with the healthcare provider

# After Diagnosis

- **There is life after a diagnosis!**
- Find support
- Engage in clinical trials
- Become an advocate for Alzheimer's disease
- Make goals and plans for the future
- Explore new hobbies
- Find strategies to help maintain independence
- Continue to focus on current skills and abilities, not what has been lost



Pictured on the right: Dr. Cynthia Huling Hummel, artist, musician and advocate  
Listen to our discussion of “Moving from ‘Why me?’ to ‘What’s next?’” at:  
<https://www.helpforalzheimersfamilies.com/community-voices/live-chat-webinars/moving-whats-next/>

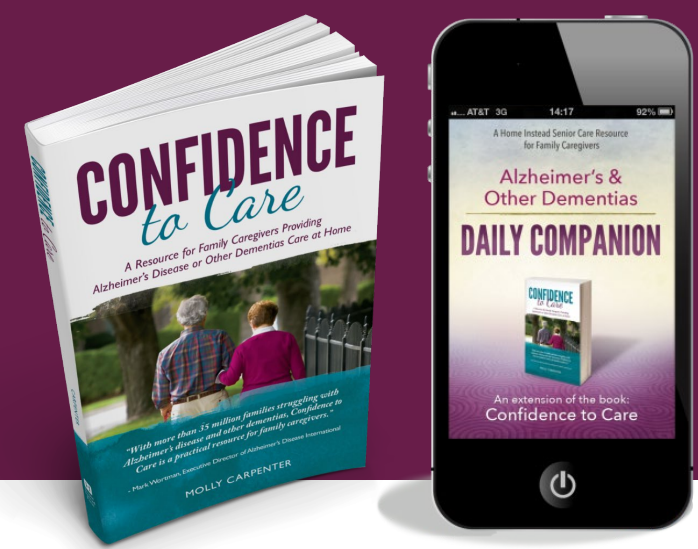


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Everyone has the possibility of having  
value every day of their lives, no  
matter what stage of the disease they  
are in.

- Dementia Alliance International

# Resources



## Confidence to Care Book

- A resource for family caregivers providing care at home to an individual living with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias.
- To learn more visit: [www.confidencetocare.com](http://www.confidencetocare.com)

## Free Alzheimer's & Other Dementias Daily Companion app

- Easily searchable tips and support
- Search for home care
- 24/7 support line
- To download, search "Alzheimer's daily companion" in the app store or visit: [Helpforalzheimersfamilies.com](http://Helpforalzheimersfamilies.com)

# Resources

## **Helpforalzheimersfamilies.com**

- Free online family education modules
- Monthly “Live Chats” with guest experts
- Dementia respite care grant application

## **Facebook Community:**

- Search: “Remember for Alzheimer's Families”

## **Caregiverstress.com**

- General caregiving resources
- Free professional CE webinars

## **In-Home Support: Home Instead**

- [www.HomeInstead.com](http://www.HomeInstead.com)

**Book:** The Best Friends Approach by Virginia Bell and David Troxel

## **Alzheimer's Association**

- Website: [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)
- 24/7 Helpline: 1.800.272.3900

## **UsAgainstAlzheimers.org**

- A-List: Patients and families transforming Alzheimer's research

## **Association for Frontotemporal Degeneration**

- [www.theaftd.org](http://www.theaftd.org)

## **Lewy Body Dementia Association**

- [www.lbda.org](http://www.lbda.org)

## **Dementia Alliance International**

- [dementiaallianceinternational.org](http://dementiaallianceinternational.org)



# Questions?

Lakelyn Hogan, Ph.D.

Gerontologist & Caregiver Advocate

Home Instead

[lakelynhogan@homeinsteadinc.com](mailto:lakelynhogan@homeinsteadinc.com)

[HomeInstead.com](https://www.HomeInstead.com)



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