

What is Dementia?

Also available in Italian | Disponibile anche in italiano

This is a resource for the Italian community. It was developed together with caregivers of people living with dementia within the Italian community in Canada. A caregiver could be a family member, friend, or another person who is supporting a person living with dementia.

This resource provides information about:



What dementia is, and the common types of dementia



Signs and symptoms of dementia



Stigma related to dementia



Having hope following a diagnosis



What is dementia?

Dementia is a term that describes a set of symptoms such as changes in memory, mood, thinking, problem-solving, communication, mobility and perception that can progress over time and affect daily life. These symptoms are a result of a variety of conditions that affect the brain. The experience of living with dementia will be different for each person.

Common types of dementia

There are many different types of dementia. Each type has different patterns of changes in the brain, symptoms, and treatments. The table below provides an overview of the most common types of dementia:

<p>Alzheimer's Disease</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most common type of dementia, 50-70% of all cases. • Occurs when there is deterioration or changes in the brain. • Common symptoms include problems with short-term memory, concentration, problem solving, and thinking.
<p>Vascular Dementia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occurs when there is poor blood flow in the brain, which can lead to death of brain cells, and strokes. • Symptoms vary depending on the size and location of damage in the brain.
<p>Fronto-temporal Dementia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occurs when there is damage in the frontal and temporal regions of the brain. • Common symptoms include changes in communication, personality and behavior such as impulsivity or inappropriate social interactions. These symptoms may not be easily recognized by health care providers because they are not typical of other dementias.

Lewy Body Dementia

- Occurs when there are clumps of protein (Lewy bodies) forming in the brain. Lewy Body Dementia and Parkinson's Disease are thought to be related because of similarities in symptoms
- Common symptoms include changes in visual-spatial skills, concentration, and attention. These symptoms can change noticeably within a day or from day to day. Visual hallucinations (seeing things that aren't there), delusions (believing things that aren't true), and abnormal movement during sleep may occur. Changes in movement and falls are also common.

Mixed Dementia

- More than one type of dementia at the same time, often Alzheimer's Disease and vascular brain changes.



“My mother who was living with dementia often believed that she was back in Italy, and she would look for people or places from her past.”

- Caregiver from the Italian community

Signs and symptoms

Dementia is progressive, meaning that symptoms will continue to develop over time. Signs and symptoms of dementia are different for each person. Someone living with dementia can experience changes in their symptoms, and may have “good days” and “bad days”. Changes may include:

- Forgetting or repeating questions, stories, details of recent events
- Changes in communication such as trouble finding the right word, difficulty with speech, writing, or understanding
- Confusion about time and place, or getting lost in familiar areas
- Changes in mood (for example, anxiety, depression, irritability) and behaviour (for example, losing interest, suspiciousness, restlessness)
- Difficulties completing everyday tasks (for example, paying bills, preparing meals, taking medications) and/or problem-solving, planning, decision-making
- Changes in mobility, balance, and perception (for example, judging distances, recognizing items)

Dementia is not a normal part of aging. It can be easy to miss the early signs of dementia, and some people assume that they are just a part of getting older. It is important to talk to your family doctor or another healthcare provider if you or someone you know is experiencing changes of concern. An early diagnosis can provide you with information, support, and access to treatment options.

Visit forwardwithdementia.ca for more information about **The Progression of Dementia**.

Stigma

Stigma refers to the assumptions, negative attitudes and/or mistreatment of people based on a trait or characteristic. People living with dementia may experience stigma when others find out about their diagnosis. Stigma can result from a lack of awareness and understanding about dementia, and overgeneralizations about what dementia is. Dementia-related stigma could be: misinformation, stereotypes, hurtful comments, assumptions about what the person living with dementia cannot do, or being excluded.

Stigma about dementia is common across many cultural communities. When developing this resource, some members of the Italian community said dementia is often assumed to be a normal part of aging, and that early memory concerns may be ignored or diminished. Caregivers shared that people living with dementia and their family members may feel shame about the diagnosis, and may be hesitant to talk about it with others. They also told us that people living with dementia and their caregivers often feel a lack of hope after receiving a diagnosis, and that limited resources were provided to them.

Stigma can prevent people from recognizing and talking about symptoms, and seeking help. This can delay diagnosis, access to treatments and services, and support from others. It can also discourage people living with dementia from living their lives and engaging in activities that are important to them.

To challenge and reduce stigma, it is important to learn about dementia, question stereotypes, and listen to people who are living with dementia.

Visit forwardwithdementia.ca for more information about **Common Views and Facts About Dementia**.

Have hope

Acknowledging changes and seeking help is the first step in moving forward. Being assessed for dementia can help to explain the changes you have noticed. Even if it's not dementia, an assessment can help rule out other causes for the changes.

Dementia is not something to be ashamed of. Knowing more about dementia and the symptoms helps you know what to expect, and what you can do to support yourself or a person in your life with dementia.

Many people with dementia and their caregivers live meaningful, full lives after diagnosis and continue to participate in activities that are important to them.

Visit forwardwithdementia.ca for more information about **Having Hope and Living Well**.



Notes

Use this space to write down any notes, reflections, or questions you have about this resource.