

The Progression of 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:



The progression of dementia and changes in abilities



How treatments and lifestyle may impact dementia



Seeking support as dementia progresses



The progression of dementia

Dementia is a term used to describe changes to the brain that can impact a person's ability to perform daily activities. Dementia progresses over time due to increasing damage and changes in the brain. **Changes can happen gradually or more quickly.** Age, the type of dementia, physical health and lifestyle, delays in diagnosis and other factors may influence how quickly dementia progresses. Speak with your doctor for information specific to your dementia diagnosis. Visit forwardwithdementia.ca for examples of **Questions to Ask After a Dementia Diagnosis.**

Changes in abilities and symptoms

A person living with dementia will experience changes in their abilities as dementia progresses. **The specific changes or symptoms will not be the same for each person. Symptoms may also develop in a different order for each person.**

There are many different types of dementia, including Alzheimer's Disease, Vascular dementia, Fronto-temporal dementia, Lewy body dementia, mixed dementia, and others. **Symptoms will vary depending on the type of dementia the person has.** For example, a person with early Fronto-temporal dementia may experience changes with their personality, behavior, or language, but maintain their memory. A person living with Lewy body dementia may experience greater challenges with mobility, hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't there), or sleep.

Visit forwardwithdementia.ca to learn more **About Dementia** and the common types.

A person living with dementia may have some days that are easier, and some that are more challenging. Their symptoms may change day-to-day, or even within the same day. **They may be further progressed in one area (for example, communication abilities), but be early in the progression of another (for example, can still manage their banking).** Despite these ups and downs, dementia continues to progress and symptoms will develop over time.

Changes as dementia progresses

Communication

- Problems with finding the right word
- Repeating phrases and questions
- Difficulty following conversations
- Going back to one's first language
- Losing the ability to communicate with words (but still communicates with sounds, facial expressions and body language)

Emotion and behaviour

- Withdrawing, or losing interest in activities
- Feeling sad, anxious, restless, or irritable
- Behaving differently, such as being impulsive, repetitive, or saying inappropriate things
- Seeing things that are not there or believing things that are not true

Memory and thinking

- Forgetting minor details
- Difficulty paying attention, problem solving and decision-making
- Forgetting recent events, one's address, or names of family members
- Confusion about time and place, such as searching for a childhood home
- Getting lost in familiar places
- Forgetting things that just happened, not recognizing family or friends

Physical abilities and daily tasks

- Difficulty with coordination and small movements, such as doing up buttons
- Problems with balance and risk of falls
- Needing help with tasks, such as getting dressed, using the bathroom, or bathing
- Losing control of bladder and bowel
- Changes to sleep, such as being awake during the night
- Difficulty walking
- Difficulty with breathing and swallowing

How do these changes impact a person living with dementia?

These progressive changes can make it challenging to complete day-to-day activities independently and safely. People living with dementia and their caregivers typically need more support as time goes on. It is important to remember that people living with dementia have awareness, preferences, and the ability to communicate in different ways, even as dementia progresses.

Treatment and lifestyle

Some types of dementia have drug treatments that do not cure dementia, but may slow progression. Non-drug strategies and treatments for symptoms may be helpful for all types of dementia.

While there is no cure for dementia, there are ways to reduce the risk of dementia. Exercise, a diet built around fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts, wholegrains, seafood and healthy fats, managing heart health, such as cholesterol and blood pressure, and staying socially and mentally active can help reduce risk of dementia.

Visit forwardwithdementia.ca to learn more about **Managing Symptoms and Changes** and **Having Hope and Living Well**.

Seeking support as dementia progresses

Early in the progression of dementia, people living with dementia may not need assistance. During this time, it is recommended for people living with dementia to make plans for the future with their caregivers and families. As dementia progresses, people living with dementia may need more support with daily tasks. Services such as adult day programs, personal care support (for example, help with bathing and dressing), and respite (support to allow caregivers to take a break) may be beneficial.

Some caregivers feel hesitant or guilty for asking for support from family and friends, or using support services. However, it is important for caregivers to take breaks and to manage the stress and difficult emotions (for example, guilt, sadness, frustration) that are often associated with caregiving.

Visit forwardwithdementia.ca to **Learn About Programs and Services and Caregiver Self Care.**

