

# Open Hearts, Changing Brains

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DEMENTIA SUPPORT  
*Northwest*  
You Are Not Alone.



# Recognizing Dementia: What Can It Look Like?

We all know that many things change as we age. Dementia is often mistaken for being part of the normal aging process but is not a natural part of age

| Normal Aging   | Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)   | Dementia   |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Some memory changes are common in aging</p> <p>Our bodies and brain slow down, but our intelligence remains stable. It can just take more time to process information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examples include forgetting where we put our keys or not recalling a name.</li></ul> | <p>We might be aware that our memory or mental function has 'slipped', and it's severe enough to be noticed by other people, but we still can manage daily life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• MCI may increase the risk of later progression to dementia, but some with MCI never worsen</li></ul> | <p>Umbrella term describing a group of symptoms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• But what is dementia..?</li></ul> |

# What is Dementia?

Each experience with dementia is different

- Influencing factors can include attitude about diagnosis, physical health, the relationships they have with friends and family, the support they receive, and their surroundings.

But most people will share some of the following symptoms:

- Declines in memory, normal thinking, communication, and reasoning ability

Dementia Involves:

- Progressive development
- *Progression varies by person, in some cases advancing rapidly, in others taking years to reach an advanced stage*
- *Rate of progression depends greatly on the underlying cause of dementia*

# (Some) Types of Dementia

## Alzheimer's Disease

- Most common and well known, accounting for about 60% of dementia cases
- Often people will say they have Alzheimer's, not dementia. This is like saying you have pancreatic cancer but not cancer.

## Vascular Dementia

- 'Post-stroke' or Multi-Infarct dementia; occurring in strokes or other brain injuries (10-20% of cases)
- Caused by problems with blood supply to the brain; symptoms vary widely depending on the brain region involved

## Dementia with Lewy Bodies

- Abnormal deposits of proteins called Lewy bodies form inside the nerve cells of the brain
- 10-20% of cases, and often in combination with Parkinson's Disease

## Fronto-temporal Dementia

- A rare disorder affecting the front and sides of the brain. Progresses faster than Alzheimer's disease and tends to occur at a younger age.

## Mixed dementias

- Occurs when multiple types of dementia-causing brain abnormalities are present, most commonly Alzheimer's and vascular dementia.

# Depression and Dementia

## Depression

- More likely to complain about memory loss
- Sudden onset, rapid mental decline
- MCI on testing which may improve on recovery
- Knowledge of correct time/date/etc.

## Dementia

- Little or no awareness of memory loss (it's good to remember than you forgot!)
- Gradual onset, decline happens slowly
- Cognition impaired on testing and will decline over time

## Shared Symptoms

- Loss of interest in activities/hobbies
- Sleep disturbances
- Isolation
- Can interfere with daily functioning

# What to do when you think dementia is happening?

## Start with a medical exam

Many things mimic dementia

- *OTC medication, Vitamin B deficiencies, infections, thyroid issues, diabetes, COPD with low O2 levels, etc.*

Referrals to neurologists, neuropsychologists, or geriatric psychiatrists (if available)

## Contact your Area Agency on Aging

- May recommend a memory screening
- Consolidated source for referrals to a wide range of support services

# Communication Strategies and Useful Tips

Don't tell them they have dementia, don't even use the term

Avoid trying to rationalize or use logic-based reasoning

Think of your role conversationally as playing a part in their play instead of focusing on trying to 'set them straight'

When facing rising feelings of anxiety or anger, blend diversion and redirection

## Caregivers: Common Experiences/Concerns

It's important to emphasize the need for caregivers to also look after their own health.

Caregivers can be experiencing:

- High levels of stress
- Isolation
- Exhaustion
- Dealing with Guilt



## Caregivers: Common Experiences/Concerns

Reflecting on certain things may help alleviate guilt:

- They're doing the best they can
- Nobody is perfect, and everyone gets frustrated with their loved ones sometimes
- Their caring and being there for their loved one helps enormously

Tips for Caring for a Person With Dementia

- Know your limits
- Prioritize
- Don't Compare Yourself
- Talk About It!

## Caregivers: Resources for Support

Looking after themselves can take on a variety of forms:

**Use technology to help** in their role as a caregiver

Ex: Use the internet to help with online banking/bill pay; shop online to buy groceries, etc.

**Join a Caregiver Support Group**, and seek additional caregiving education

**Talk to their PCP** if struggling to cope or feeling depressed, anxious, or stressed

# For Caregivers: You Are Not Alone

Need additional resources, guidance, or support? No caregiver should feel like they have to go it alone, and fortunately in Washington always there.

Northwest Regional Council: 360.676.6749, [www.nwrcwa.org](http://www.nwrcwa.org)

- Comprehensive support services, case management, and referrals

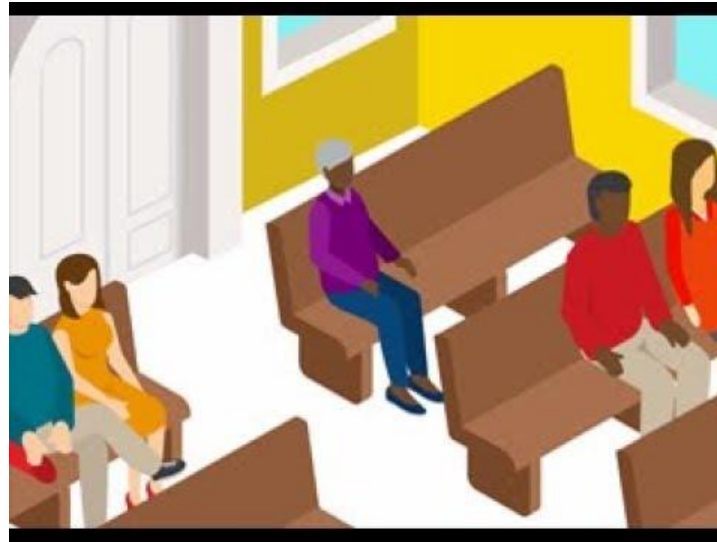
Dementia Support Northwest: 360.671.3316, [www.dementiasupportnw.org](http://www.dementiasupportnw.org)

- Support groups, educational offerings, trainings, and Project Lifesaver enrollment

Dementia Action Collaborative: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/dementia-action-collaborative>

- The Dementia Roadmap
- Dementia Legal Planning Toolkit
- Dementia Safety Info Kit

# What does it mean to be Dementia Friendly?



*Memory Cafés*

*Service Projects*

*Care Partner*

*Support Groups*

*Art Classes*

*Choirs*

*Worship Buddies*

*Prayer Groups*

*Friendly Visitor  
Programs*





## How to reach us:

For personalized assistance with a dementia related issue, please contact your local Aging and Disability Resource Center.

**(360)738-2500**

600 Lakeway Drive  
Bellingham, WA 98225

[ADRCWhatcom@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:ADRCWhatcom@dshs.wa.gov)

For material requests or to request a training, please contact  
[NWRCdementia@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:NWRCdementia@dshs.wa.gov)

# Dementia Support Program at Northwest Regional Council