

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Senior Care

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### Understanding dementia & memory loss

*Published August 29, 2013*

Forgetfulness can happen at any age. More often than not, these temporary lapses are not indicative of larger cognitive issues, such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease. However, signs of memory loss should be brought up with your physician if they become disruptive to your daily routine or begin to affect social relationships.

"Dementia" is an umbrella term for a collection of symptoms involving memory loss and confusion caused by disease. While there are more than 100 types of dementia, 60 to 80 percent of cases are caused by Alzheimer's disease. According to the Alzheimer's Association, more than 5 million Americans are currently living with the disease, with another person developing it every 68 seconds. This incurable and progressive disease will only become more prevalent: in 2050, an American will develop the disease every 33 seconds. Because of this, it is imperative that we understand the signs and symptoms of the disease.

Most commonly caused by Alzheimer's, dementia can also come on after a stroke or a number of other diseases like multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease or HIV/AIDS. Symptoms include significant impairment of communication or language, the ability to focus, reasoning, and several other cognitive functions. A loved one may have difficulty with familiar tasks, feel disoriented in normally familiar places or may misuse and repeat simple words or phrases within the same conversation.

Outside of the above diseases, there are a few influencing factors that may bring on dementia that we should be sure to watch out for over the course of our lives. High toxicity levels, which may be caused by excessive alcohol or drug use, are a large contributor to memory disorders. Certain nutritional deficiencies, like lacking vitamin B12 or folate, can increase a dementia risk, as can head injuries, whether in one large instance or several smaller injuries (like those sustained in sports).

As these diseases become more prevalent, it's important for us to understand how to best care for and interact with a person suffering from dementia. The primary driver in caring for someone with dementia is respect. A person with dementia is a unique and valuable human being. Caregivers should do everything possible to help maintain the person's sense of self-worth.

Effective communication is one of the most essential tools to maintain when spending time with a dementia sufferer. Maintaining tolerance, patience and a sense of humor is key. It's important to remember when caring for someone with dementia that each and every dementia sufferer is a unique individual with his or her own needs and likes. Though dementia affects each person differently, all dementia sufferers will benefit from an environment of positivity and reassurance, especially from loved ones.

Memory care centers are cropping up across the country, offering a safe, optimistic environment, as well as respite for caregivers. While momentary memory lapses can be a natural part of aging,

significant and rapid decline in memory is not. If you or someone you know deals with memory issues, visit a physician to learn why.

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