



Alzheimer's disease is the main cause of dementia. The word dementia describes a number of symptoms that may include memory loss and changes in mood or behaviour. They may also include difficulties with thinking, language and problem-solving.

## Get support

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI) provides the main source of supports for all types of dementia. For example, they provide one-to-one dementia nurse advice, online support groups and family training.

### Contact ASI on

- › Freephone Confidential National Helpline: 1800 341 341
- › Email: [helpline@alzheimer.ie](mailto:helpline@alzheimer.ie)
- › Website: [www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ie)

### For more information and support

- › The DSiDC provide education, training and information on best practice in dementia care. For more information visit [www.dementia.ie](http://www.dementia.ie)
- › [www.understandtogether.ie](http://www.understandtogether.ie)
- › HSE helpline: 1850 24 1850



Dementia Services Information and Development Centre  
6th Floor, Mercer's Institute for Successful Ageing  
St James's Hospital, James's Street  
Dublin 8, D08 E9P6

[www.dementia.ie](http://www.dementia.ie)



# Alzheimer's disease



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**Alzheimer's disease is a brain illness associated with certain proteins in the brain. When these proteins build up, brain cells die. Symptoms of Alzheimer's disease may include memory loss and difficulty with thinking, problem-solving and language. They may also lead to changes in mood or behaviour.**

The changes caused by Alzheimer's disease are small at the beginning and get worse over time. When the changes affect how a person performs everyday tasks, such as shopping or banking, then a doctor can make a diagnosis of dementia.

Our chances of developing Alzheimer's disease or another dementia increase as we grow older.

Dementia affects about one in 10 people aged over 65 and about one in three people aged over 80.

Genetic forms of Alzheimer's disease are rare and affect only a very small number of people. They usually occur in people under the age of 65.

## Symptoms

The early signs of Alzheimer's can be difficult to detect. It can take up to two years for the person and family to notice enough changes to look for a doctor's appointment.

Common symptoms are:

- › Memory loss, particularly for recent events
- › Repeating questions or stories
- › Difficulty finding the right words
- › Difficulty in following conversations
- › Poor concentration
- › Changes in mood and behaviour
- › Getting lost in familiar surroundings

- › Difficulty managing money and other everyday tasks
- › Difficulty with thinking, planning and problem-solving
- › Loss of interest in hobbies and other activities

## Progression

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive and chronic condition. Change is often gradual and can take a number of years. This can vary from person to person.

While memory loss tends to get gradually worse, many people with dementia can function well for a long time – with support from their families, communities, technology and health services. With the passing of time, people with dementia may find it more difficult to perform everyday tasks, such as getting dressed, bathing or recognising family and friends.

Every person experiences the illness differently. It can be difficult to predict how it will progress and what might happen in the future.

## Treatment

There are medicines for the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. The medicines do not stop or reverse the damage caused but they can improve the symptoms or help with concentration. Although the benefits are modest, they can be helpful to you, especially earlier in the course of the disease.

Changes in lifestyle are helpful for brain health, even when you have Alzheimer's disease. Exercise improves mood and sleep. A balanced diet, enough sleep, and limited alcohol intake as well as not smoking are very important. Conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure or high cholesterol should be treated by a doctor.

Mental stimulation and being socially active will also help.

Hearing problems should be checked and corrected.

## Living well

It is important that both you and your family, or carer, look for information and support after a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease.

- › Understanding the disease helps you plan for the future.
- › Be hopeful in your outlook.
- › Maintain good levels of physical activity or even increase them.
- › Look after your mental health.
- › Be aware that infections (for example, chest and urine infections) can cause serious complications. Any infections should be treated by a doctor as soon as possible.
- › Keep connected with your friends and families where possible.
- › Look for supports. Consider contacting your Public Health Nurse or local Dementia Advisor.
- › Changes to your environment can make your life easier. For example, de-cluttering your home can make it easier to find things.
- › Live one day at a time.

