Dementia (Major Neurocognitive Disorder)

What is Dementia?

Dementia is not a normal part of ageing. It affects a person's ability to think, reasoning, remember, learn new information and skills, problem solving and make judgements.

It is characterized by progressive worsening of memory and cognitive abilities, orientation, and personality.

How common is Dementia?

The prevalence of dementia increases with age. In Singapore, about 1 in 10 above 60 years old suffers from dementia. This corresponds to approximately 82,000 people with dementia in 2018 and is projected to increase to 152,000 by 2030.

Types of Dementia

There are many types of dementia. A few common types of dementia are listed as follows.

Dementia	Description
Alzheimer dementia (The most common type of dementia)	Caused by the deposit of "beta amyloid" protein and the loss of neurons in the brain which may result in memory loss, behavioural issues, or problems with judgement.
Vascular dementia	Caused by reduced blood flow to the brain, often due to stroke or damaged blood vessels from high blood pressure or diabetes. Symptoms can be vary depending on which of the brain is affected.
Frontotemporal dementia	Involved the degeneration of nerve cells in the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain which may lead to personality changes and behavioural issues.
Dementia with Lewy bodies	Caused by build-up protein in the brain called "Lewy bodies" which may lead to visual hallucination of people or animals, rigidity, tremors, or gait disturbances.
Parkinson disease dementia	Occurred as Parkinson's disease advances, resulting in memory loss, behavioural issues, or problems with judgement.
Mixed dementia	Involved the combination of two or more types of dementia in an individual. Symptom depends on the type of dementia involved.

Stages of dementia

Dementia is often divided into three stages: early, moderate, and late. However, symptoms in the moderate stage can vary, and it is advisable to seek specialist advice for accurate staging. Some features of early and late symptoms of dementia are listed below:

Early symptoms	Late symptoms
• May have difficult focusing, easily distracted, not able to hold new information in mind. • May have challenges in taking public transportation, managing finances, managing medications • Poor judgement	• Depends on others for basic care needs, such as feeding, personal hygiene, and going to the toilet • Likely to be chairbound or even bedbound • Unable to recognise family members and common objects

How to Diagnose?

Diagnosing a loved one with dementia may require several consultations over a period of time. Healthcare professionals will gather a detailed history, perform physical examination, cognitive tests and relevant investigations to assess your loved one for dementia.

Management

There is no cure for dementia. However, there are medications that may help to improve the behavioral symptoms of dementia and slow down the progression of cognitive decline in certain types of dementia.

Non-pharmacological Management

Non-pharmacological management of dementia is highly important because it addresses the needs of individuals beyond what medication can provide, focusing on improving their quality of life, maintaining their dignity, and managing their symptoms in a holistic manner. Here are some tips to consider:

- **Physical activity:** Performing regular exercise can help maintain overall health
- **Nutrition:** Eating a healthy diet plays a key role in supporting brain and overall health
- **Sleep:** Encouraging adequate sleep and having consistent sleep routine helps improves rest and reduces agitation
- **Safety:** Modifying the home environment to ensure safety e.g. install grab bars, anti-slip mat
- **Emotional support:** By validating their emotions, caregivers can help reduce feelings of frustration and confusion in person with dementia.
- **Cognitive stimulation:** Engaging in activities like puzzles, music, art or even simple conversations are helpful.
- **Routine and structure:** Maintaining a consistent daily schedule is helpful in managing confusion and anxiety
- **Behavioral management:** Using distraction techniques when a loved one becomes upset or agitated can help shift their focus away, such as redirecting attention to a pleasant memory or simple activity like folding towels

Communication tips

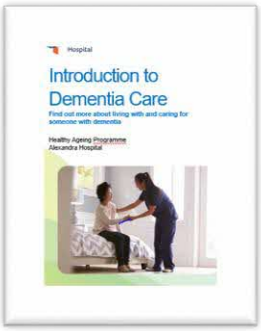
It can be challenging to communicate with a person with dementia, you may consider the following communication tips

- Maintain a calm tone of voice
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Ask one question at a time
- Break down complex tasks into a series of simple steps
- Set a positive mood for interaction
- Speak directly to your loved one and approach them from front so they are aware of your presence
- Provide a supportive and conducive space to encourage your loved one to share

Here are Dementia resources available in Singapore.

Dementia Hub	A Caregiver Guide to Avoid Burnout
A Resource Kit for Caregivers	CARA
Living with Dementia	Understanding Dementia e-learning

AH Resources

	Register now

Notes:

It's never easy to be a caregiver for a person with dementia. Please reach out to our healthcare professionals for further support if needed.

If you are unsure and need more information:
Message us via your dedicated WhatsApp group or email asknuhsathome@nuhs.edu.sg.

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http://for.sg/nuhsathomesite

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