



SENIOR SERVICES
Helping Our Elderly Live With Dignity

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DIFFERENT TYPES OF DEMENTIA

Dementia is a broad category that refers to the loss of cognitive functioning due to changes in the brain. The changes can affect memory, reasoning and judgment and can occur gradually or quickly. Below are some common forms of dementia.

Alzheimer's Disease is the most common type of dementia. It is a progressive brain disease characterized by lesions in the brain that clog areas and prevent communication between the brain cells. Cells in the brain are gradually destroyed, and nerve cells die. Areas in the brain become smaller, and cavities within the brain containing fluid become enlarged.

Vascular dementia is another type of dementia that is caused by a series of small strokes. These "mini-strokes" often go unnoticed but cause damage to the cortex—the area associated with learning, memory and language. Mini-strokes are sometimes referred to as TIAs (transient ischemic attacks). TIAs cause temporary, partial blockages of blood supply and brief impairments in consciousness or sight. However, over time the damage caused to brain tissues interferes with basic cognitive functions.

Other less known types of dementia that affect memory, judgment, personality, behaviors, orientation, coordination, or language problems are Pick's Disease, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, Huntington's Disease, Parkinson's Disease, and Lewy Body Disease. Pick's Disease is more common in women, usually occurring at an early age. Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease is caused by an infectious organism and is progressive. Huntington's Disease is an inherited, degenerative disease that causes involuntary movement and usually begins during mid-life. Parkinson's is a progressive disorder of the central nervous system. In later stages of Parkinson's, some people develop dementia. Symptoms of Lewy Body Disease are similar to Alzheimer's and include memory problems, confusion, language problems and difficulty with current events.

Dementia affects the cognitive functions of decision-making, spatial orientation, verbal communication and neglect of personal safety, hygiene and nutrition. Forgetting things periodically may not be a sign of dementia. However, if someone is having a harder time than usual with reasoning or finds him or herself being uncharacteristically forgetful and indecisive, it might be something to investigate.

Certain changes in memory and thinking skills are also characteristic of the aging process. If symptoms persist and worsen over a period of time, a person should be checked by a physician who specializes in treating older adults. Dehydration, depression, poor nutrition, vitamin deficiency, and drug reactions can also cause confusion and memory loss. Only a physician can help determine the cause.

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