

# Fact boxes on dementia

On this page you will find fact boxes on dementia, prevalence in Denmark, mortality, societal costs, treatment, early signs and symptoms of dementia and risk factors.

Feel free to copy the content with reference to the Danish Dementia Research Centre.

## What is dementia?

Dementia is a common term for a number of medical conditions characterized by persistent impairment of mental functions. Dementia is not a specific disorder, as many different disorders may cause dementia.

The term 'dementia' is used about cognitive impairment that develops in adulthood - as opposed to 'congenital mental retardation' or 'late brain injury'. The latter term that is often used about the consequences of an acute brain injury in adults, for example after a severe head trauma.

Dementia most often affects people over the age of 65 but may occur as early as the age of 40-50.

There are some differences in how dementia is defined, but the majority of professionals would agree that dementia is characterized by the following:

- Impairment in one or more cognitive domains, often including memory impairment.
- Evidence of a significant cognitive decline from a previous level of performance.
- Decline in everyday activities.
- The symptoms do not only occur exclusively in the context of a delirium.
- The cognitive deficits are not better explained by another mental disorder.

## Prevalence in Denmark

- Based on epidemiological studies it may be estimated that approx. 87,000 people over the age of 65 have dementia.
- Approx. 37,575 people over the age of 65 are diagnosed with dementia.
- Approx. 3,000 people under the age of 65 are diagnosed with dementia.
- The registered prevalence of dementia grows by approx. 1.5% annually.
- Approx. 60 percent of registered cases of dementia are women, just over 40 percent are men.

## Dementia mortality

Dementia is a fatal condition. A person with a dementia disorder usually lives between 5-8 years after the diagnosis has been made, but the survival time may also be significantly shorter or longer. Approx. 4,500 deaths are caused by dementia every year in Denmark. This makes dementia the fourth most common cause of death in Denmark.

## Societal costs

The additional costs per person with dementia is approx. DKK 223,000 in 2015 prices. In total, this gives an additional cost of approx. 8 billion DKK for all citizens registered with a dementia diagnosis.

## Treatment

Dementia is currently both incurable and irreversible. This is due to the fact that neurodegenerative dementia disorders, i.e. diseases characterized by a gradual, often slow degradation of the brain and its functions, are complex disorders involving several different disease mechanisms. The medicines currently available has only a stabilizing, temporary, effect on dementia symptoms.

## 10 early signs of dementia

Dementia affects people differently, and no two disease courses are alike. Yet some signs are so typical that the American Alzheimer's Association has formulated 10 warning signs and symptoms applying to most cases of dementia.

If you or one of your family members notice any of these signs, don't ignore them. Schedule an appointment with your doctor.

1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems
3. Difficulty performing familiar tasks
4. Confusion with time and place
5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships
6. New problems with words in speaking or writing
7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps
8. Decreased or poor judgment
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities
10. Changes in mood and personality

[For further information go to this page](#)

## Risk factors of dementia

Old age is the strongest risk factor for developing dementia. Absolute prevention of dementia is not an option, but it is possible to reduce the risk of developing a dementia disorder and delay onset of dementia.

Epidemiological studies indicate that the following factors may increase the risk of dementia or cognitive impairment:

- Uncorrected hearing loss
- Less education
- Smoking
- Depression
- Social isolation
- Traumatic brain injury
- Air pollution
- Midlife hypertension
- Physical inactivity
- Diabetes
- Excessive alcohol consumption (>21 units/week)
- Midlife obesity (body-mass index  $\geq 30$ )

[For further information go to this page](#)

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