

Alzheimer's disease

Dementia is a general term used to describe various symptoms that occur when the brain has been weakened by disease. Dementia leads to problems with memory, decision making and communication.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia.

Early signs of the disease

People with Alzheimer's disease can have difficulty remembering the names of friends and family members and everyday words. Their short-term memory is particularly affected. They often need help remembering appointments and have trouble finding their way or counting small change.

As the disease progresses, the person's moods, temperament and personality can change. An extroverted, active, social person may become irritable, passive and introverted.

Difficult to function on a daily basis

Initially it is difficult to distinguish the symptoms from general confusion and forgetfulness. However, the changes gradually become more obvious, especially to close family members and friends. It becomes impossible for the person to cope with a job or manage the shopping and cooking.

The symptoms worsen as time goes on. People with Alzheimer's disease can lose their sense of time and confuse day and night. The disease typically progresses over several years after the time of diagnosis.

Most people with Alzheimer's are elderly

Alzheimer's disease accounts for roughly 2/3 of all dementia cases. In Denmark, the number of people with Alzheimer's disease is approximately 25.000 persons over the age of 65.

The risk of developing Alzheimer's disease increases with age. Very few cases of Alzheimer's disease are hereditary. High blood pressure, diabetes, smoking and physical inactivity are some of the known risk factors for the disease. That is why it is important to eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly and avoid smoking.

What goes on in the brain?

It is not known what causes Alzheimer's disease, but researchers describe how the protein beta amyloid clumps together and deposits build up between brain cells. Inside the cells, tangles of the protein tau form, hindering the transport of important brain transmitters. Gradually larger areas of the brain become affected by these changes.

Accurate and early diagnosis important

If you are worried about Alzheimer's disease, you should consult your doctor. Your doctor will not be able to make a diagnosis straight away, but will refer you to various tests and examinations and talk to members of your family. It is important to get an accurate diagnosis to ensure proper treatment and care.

Treatment and care

There is no cure for Alzheimer's disease yet, but drugs are available that can temporarily reduce the symptoms. However, not all patients with Alzheimer's disease respond to the drugs, and treatment should not be confined to medication only.

For patients and family members, some of the most important aspects of treatment are advice and practical support concerning issues like dressing, hygiene and respite care.

Local contact information: