

What is dementia?

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.

Everyone has episodes of forgetfulness or sometimes experiences feelings of not being able to cope. People with dementia, however, gradually lose their ability to manage everyday tasks by themselves.

Dementia caused by disease – not age

Dementia is always caused by disease, and over 200 different diseases can lead to dementia. The belief that dementia is a natural consequence of ageing is a myth; however, the risk of developing dementia does increase with age. The majority of the 87,000 people with dementia in Denmark are over 65.

Examples of diseases

The most frequent cause of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, accounting for at least half of all dementia cases. Vascular dementia is also common, while Lewy body dementia, dementia in Parkinson's disease and fronto-temporal dementia are rarer. Dementia is only rarely hereditary.

Signs of dementia

Most people with dementia become forgetful or have difficulty remembering names or appointments. For example, someone who used to be very good at expressing themselves might now need help to find words or someone who used to have a good sense of direction might now need help finding their way around.

In some cases, the person may change personality, become apathetic or have difficulties in social situations. Often, dementia affects the person's ability to manage everyday tasks, such as handling money, cooking and shopping.

Progression of the disease varies

Most dementia diseases progress over time. New symptoms develop and the individual gradually loses more and more abilities. How the disease progresses, depends on the cause, and similarly the duration of the disease can vary from a few years to several decades.

Accurate and early diagnosis important for treatment

If you are worried about dementia, you should contact your doctor. The available treatment options depend on which disease is causing the symptoms. That is why it is important to pinpoint exactly what has triggered the dementia in order to draw up a treatment plan as early as possible.

Normally, counselling for the patient and family members, practical support and respite care are the most important aspects of treatment.

In some cases, such as with Alzheimer's disease, drugs can help to ease the symptoms. In the case of vascular dementia, which is often caused by small strokes, patients are given medication that prevents the formation of further strokes.

Think of the future

The more you know about the dementia affecting you, the easier it is for you and your family members to make decisions for the future concerning issues like moving, writing a will or getting assistance and support.

Sharing experiences with others in the same situation can also be valuable. Every local district (kommune) has dementia counsellors or coordinators who can advise you on the options available for care and support.

Local contact information: