

# Information Session

**People with dementia need to be understood and supported in their communities.**

**You can help by becoming a Dementia Friend.**

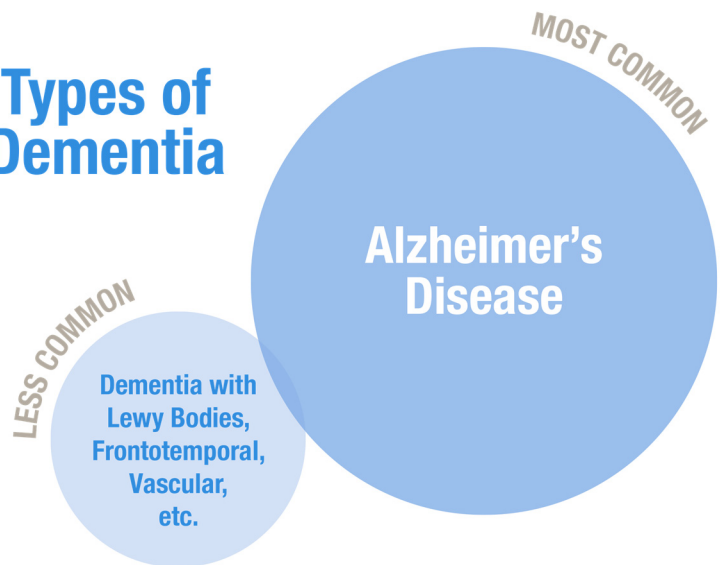
**Visit [www.dementiafriendsusa.org](http://www.dementiafriendsusa.org) to learn more!**

## What is Dementia?

Dementia is not a specific disease. It's an overall term that describes a wide range of symptoms associated with a decline in memory or other thinking skills severe enough to reduce a person's ability to perform everyday activities.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia and accounts for 60 to 80 percent of cases. Other types of dementia include Dementia with Lewy Bodies, Frontotemporal, and Vascular.

### Types of Dementia



## Alzheimer's Disease vs. Normal Aging

10 Early Signs and Symptoms	Normal Aging
1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life	Sometimes forgetting names or appointments but remembering them later
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems	Making occasional errors when balancing a checkbook
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure	Needing occasional help to use the settings on a microwave or to record a TV show
4. Confusion with time or place	Confused about the day of the week but recalling it later
5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships	Vision changes related to cataracts
6. New problems with words in speaking or writing	Sometimes having trouble finding the right word
7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps	Misplacing things from time to time and retracing steps to find them
8. Decreased or poor judgment	Making a bad decision once in awhile
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities	Sometimes feeling weary of work, family and social obligations
10. Changes in mood and personality	Developing very specific ways of doing things and becoming irritable when a routine is disrupted.

**Source:**

[www.alz.org/10-signs-symptoms-alzheimers-dementia.asp](http://www.alz.org/10-signs-symptoms-alzheimers-dementia.asp)

## Broken Sentences Worksheet

Match the sentences in Column 1 to Column 2 by drawing a line from each sentence beginning to the corresponding sentence end. You should end up with five sentences that make sense and become five key messages about dementia!

Column 1
1. Dementia is not ...
2. Dementia is caused by...
3. Dementia is not just...
4. It is possible to have a...
5. There's more to the person than...

Column 2
A. ...diseases of the brain.
B. ...the dementia.
C. ... good quality of life with dementia.
D. ... about having memory problems.
E. ...a normal part of aging.

## The River

For every human being, life is like a river. The constant flow of water represents our daily experiences—from routine and familiar to those that take us by surprise. If we are lucky enough to live a long life, we will experience the river in each of the four seasons—spring, summer, fall, and winter.

**Spring** is early childhood, when the river is new to us and we are just learning about all the fish, birds, and animals that connect with it. **Summer** is our experience from childhood to adulthood, when we transition from relying on others to navigating the water and harvesting for ourselves. **Fall** is adulthood, when we know the river and its resources and dangers well enough to provide for others, raise children, and chart our own course in the world. **Winter** is elderhood, when we have acquired the deepest knowledge and wisdom, but also start to experience changes from the aging of our bodies.

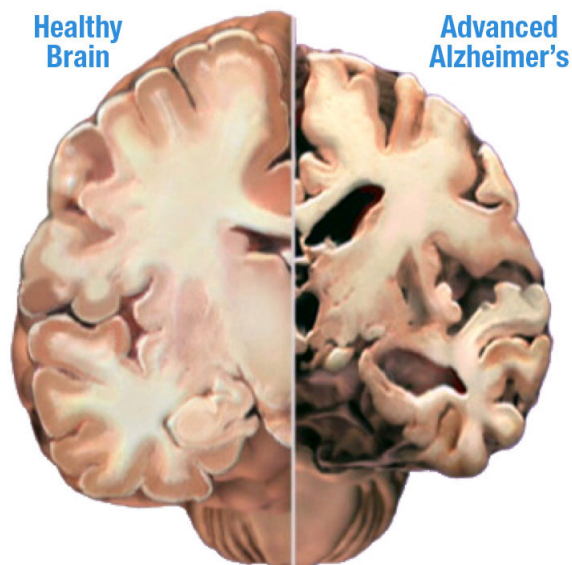
Dementia is like a brutal blizzard. Blizzards can come in any season, although they are most common and most severe in winter. The wind and snow mute the sight and sound of the water. Everyday experiences—the natural flow of the water—become harder to appreciate and navigate. Thinking activities that used to be easy, like planning a fishing trip, buying bait, planning meals for the day, and reaching out to others to join the activity, become increasingly difficult. However, even at the onset of the blizzard, emotional experiences and feelings remain strong—the love of fishing, the memory of the sunlight gleaming off the rippling current, and the joy of company, for example.

The progression of dementia is like experiencing a growing blizzard without end. The prolonged exposure to cold starts to freeze the river. The everyday flow of experiences beneath the surface is increasingly difficult to reach and navigate without help. Eventually, even deep and lifelong emotional and spiritual connections are harder to access through the thickening ice.

*This analogy of a river in a blizzard helps explain the experience of dementia. Facts, recent memory and complex thinking become hard to reach in the ice. Emotions and feelings remain longer, but the prolonged exposure to the blizzard can eventually freeze those as well.*

## Everyday Tasks

Write a step-by-step instruction list to complete a task you do daily or often. Make sure someone reading your list could follow the instructions successfully to complete the task.



## Communication Practices

**Consider these tips when communicating with a person with dementia.**

**Treat the person with dignity and respect.** Avoid talking past the person as if he or she isn't there.

**Be aware of your feelings.** Your tone of voice may communicate your attitude. Use positive, friendly facial expressions.

**Be patient and supportive.** Let the person know that you are listening and trying to understand.

**Offer comfort and reassurance.** If the person is having trouble communicating, reassure them that it's okay and encourage the person to continue.

**Avoid criticizing or correcting.** Don't tell the person what was said was incorrect. Instead, listen and try to find the meaning in what is being said.

**Avoid arguing.** If the person says something you don't agree with, let it be. Arguing usually only makes things worse and often increases agitation for the person with dementia.

**Offer a guess.** If the person uses the wrong word or cannot find a word, try guessing the right word. If you understand what the person means, finding the right word may not be necessary.

**Encourage nonverbal communication.** If you don't understand what is being said, ask the person to point or gesture.

## Conversation Tips

### **When approaching the person with dementia and starting a conversation:**

- Come from the front, identify yourself, and keep good eye contact. If the person isn't standing, go down to eye level.
- Call the person by their preferred name to get his or her attention.
- Use short, simple phrases and repeat information as needed. Ask one question at a time.
- Speak slowly and clearly. Use a gentle and relaxed tone.
- Patiently wait for a response while the person takes time to process what you said.

### **During the conversation:**

- Provide a statement rather than ask a question. For example, say "The bathroom is right here," instead of asking, "Do you need to use the bathroom?"
- Avoid vague statements about something you want the person to do. Speak directly: "Please come here. Your lunch is ready." Name an object or place. Rather than "Here it is," say "Here is your hat."
- Turn negatives into positives. Instead of saying, "Don't go there," say, "Let's go here."
- Give visual cues. Point or touch the item you want the person to use or begin the task yourself.
- Avoid quizzing statements like "Do you remember when?"
- Try using written notes or pictures as reminders if the person is able to understand them.

## Five Key Messages

- Dementia is not a normal part of aging.
- Dementia is caused by diseases of the brain.
- Dementia is not just about having memory problems.
- It is possible to have a good quality of life with dementia.
- There's more to the person than the dementia.

## Turn Your Understanding into Action

### As a Dementia Friend, I will...

- \_\_\_\_\_ get in touch and stay in touch with someone I know living with dementia.
- \_\_\_\_\_ be patient.
- \_\_\_\_\_ be more understanding.
- \_\_\_\_\_ carry out this personal action:

## Resources in Your Community

**Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline** serves people with memory loss, caregivers, health care professionals, general public, diverse populations, and concerned friends and family. Helpline provides referrals to local community programs and services, dementia-related education, crisis assistance and emotional support. 1-800-272-3900 or [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)