

Pacific Regional Centre for Healthy Aging

Health Topics: Delirium

[What is Dementia?](#)

[Symptoms of Dementia](#)

[Key Facts](#)

[Dementia Facts](#)

[Prevention](#)

[Treatment](#)

[Warning Signs](#)

[First Steps](#)

[Dementia Statistics](#)

[Resources](#)

[Websites and Organizations](#)

[Phone Support](#)

[Indigenous Support](#)

[Podcasts](#)

[Studies](#)

[Music as Healing](#)

Dementia

What is Dementia?

Dementia is term used to describe a group of symptoms that affect the way you think, remember, act, and feel. When people have dementia, the symptoms interfere with their daily lives.

Dementia isn't one specific disease. Several different diseases can cause dementia. Different types of dementia need different types of treatment, so it is important to know what type you have.

Symptoms include

- Problems with memory
- Changes in mood
- Difficulties with thinking, solving problems, and speaking
- Changes in personality
- Confusion

Learn more

Video: [Getting to Know Dementia: What is Dementia?](#) From the Alzheimer Society of British Columbia

Things You Should Know About Dementia

“Alzheimers” is not another word for dementia. Dementia is a word for a group of symptoms related to how you act, think, plan, and remember. Alzheimer’s is a disease that affects the brain and causes dementia. About 65 – 70% of dementia cases are caused by Alzheimer’s, but there are over 100 other types of dementia.

Dementia is not a normal part of aging. It does not happen to all older people, although it occurs more often the older you are. Many people live into their 90s without dementia. Read about the difference between normal aging and dementia [here](#).

There are many things we can do to avoid dementia. By making healthy choices, we can delay the beginning of the disease and slow down its progress. Studies suggest that about 40% of dementia cases could be prevented by changes in lifestyle. See [Preventing Dementia](#), below.

Dementia is not usually inherited. Only one type of dementia is significantly genetic (this means you inherit it from a parent or grandparent). This type is called Early-Onset Alzheimer’s, and it is rare. But with other types of dementia, the genetic influence is much smaller, and lifestyle plays a big role.

10 Ways to Prevent Dementia

1. Stay active

Find something you like to do that keeps you moving. Activity is even more effective if you combine it with social connection or if you are learning something new. Some studies suggest that 21% of Alzheimer’s cases are directly linked to lack of physical activity.

2. Get a good sleep

Your brain cleans out toxins while you are sleeping

3. Stay involved socially

Visit neighbours, attend community events, drop into a seniors’ centre, join a support group, see friends and family

4. Take care of your hearing

Get your hearing tested and wear hearing aids if you need them

5. Make healthy lifestyle choices

Eat healthy foods, stay at a healthy weight, reduce stress, drink lots of healthy fluids, see your health care provider regularly, and don’t smoke

6. Get treatment for health conditions

If you have depression, diabetes, high cholesterol, or high-blood pressure, see your health care provider to treat and manage these illnesses

7. Cut back on alcohol or quit completely

Alcohol can lead to dementia. Also, for people who have dementia, alcohol can make the disease progress more quickly.

8. Protect your head

Head injuries can contribute to people getting dementia. Wear a helmet for activities where a head injury could happen

9. Challenge your thinking

Do things that make your brain work. Play games, learn a language or a new computer app, or take a dance class—find something you enjoy doing and make time for it

10. Find meaning in life

Find a purpose to get out of bed each day

People who are physically frail are four times as likely to develop dementia compared to people who are not physically frail. Everything on this list is helpful in preventing frailty.

Learn more about preventing dementia with these two fact sheets from the Alzheimer Society of Canada:

[12 actions for a healthier brain at any age](#)

[Brain-healthy tips to reduce your risk of dementia](#)

How is Dementia Treated?

Dementia can't be cured, but treatment can slow it down and make it easier to live with.

Treatment and management options include:

- Medications that can help with dementia generally and with specific symptoms caused by dementia
- Lifestyle changes such as
 - Exercise
 - Having an active social life
 - Keeping your brain active via puzzles and games and other stimulating activities
 - Reorganizing the home to be safer and easier to live in
- Getting help from **home and community care** programs. This can improve the health, well-being, and quality of life for someone with dementia and for their caregivers.

Learn more:

Brochure: [Alzheimer's Treatment Options](#) from the Alzheimer Society of British Columbia

Video: [Getting to Know Dementia: Responding to a Diagnosis](#) from the Alzheimer Society of British Columbia

Warning Signs: When to Talk to a Health Care Provider

It can be hard to know what is natural forgetfulness and what is cause for concern. Look out for

- Changes in behaviour
- Symptoms that don't go away or get worse
- Behaviour that doesn't make sense. For instance, getting lost in a new place isn't a reason to be concerned, but getting lost in a familiar place is
- A decrease in social activity—no longer seeing friends and family; not going out

Get advice early

It's better to talk to a health care provider early, even if you are not sure there is a problem. Early treatment can slow down the progress of dementia and give people a happier, healthier life for longer.

Also, the symptoms you are seeing might be caused by something other than dementia. The symptoms could be caused by medication side effects, depression, diabetes, or a nutritional problem. These can be dangerous and need to be treated.

Call a doctor right away if a person suddenly becomes confused or upset or doesn't seem to know who or where they are. These are signs of **delirium**, which not the same as dementia. The difference is that in delirium, the symptoms happen suddenly. With delirium, usually it can be treated successfully, and early identification and treatment is important.

Learn more

Fact sheet: [10 Warning Signs of Dementia](#) from the Alzheimer Society of British Columbia

Video: [10 Warning Signs of Dementia](#) from the Alzheimer Society of British Columbia

What's the first step if I am concerned about dementia?

Talk to your primary care provider about your concerns.

You can also **call First Link**, a free and 100% confidential phone service offered by the Alzheimer Society of British Columbia. First Link lets you talk to someone who knows a lot about dementia. They can answer you questions and help you decide on next steps.

Advice for Caregivers

Taking care of someone with dementia is physically and emotionally hard work.

Research shows that caring for a person with dementia can be more stressful than caring for a person with a physical disability. People caring for someone with dementia spend an average of 26 hours per week providing care. Caregivers need to take care of themselves as well.

Here are three places caregivers can find help:

[Family Caregivers of British Columbia](#)

Free Support Line: [1-877-520-3267](tel:1-877-520-3267)

One-on-one support and advice, education, information, support groups, videos, and more.

Home and Community Health

B.C.'s public health care system offers many different services such as health care workers who come to your home to help, day programs, and residential care homes, and more. Ask your primary care provider about how to get this help, or learn more at [Finding Home and Community Care Services](#)

[Dementia Caregiver Resilience Clinic](#)

A program at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver that offers groups and one-on-one support.

Dementia by the Numbers

Number of people living with dementia in Canada (based on a major study from 2020)

- In the year 2020: 600,000
- By the year 2030: one million
- By the year 2050: 1.7 million. This is almost triple the 2020 numbers.

The power of prevention

- Delaying the onset of dementia by 1 year would avoid nearly 500,000 cases of dementia over the next 30 years in Canada.
- Delaying the onset by 10 years would avoid more than 4 million cases.

The costs of care giving

- In 2020, there were 350,000 care partners for people with dementia in Canada. That equals
 - 470 million hours of care
 - 235,000 full-time jobs
- By the year 2050, the number of caregivers will be more than 1 million. That equals
 - Over 1.4 billion hours per year
 - 690,000 full-time jobs

How Common is Dementia?

- At age 65, each of us has a 1% chance of being affected by dementia
- At age 75, each of us has an 8% chance of being affected by dementia
- At age 85, each of us has about a 30% chance of being affected by dementia
- Dementia is the seventh leading cause of death in the world

Resources

Websites and Organizations

[Alzheimer Society of British Columbia](#)

1-800-936-6033

info@alzheimercbc.org

This organization offers a wide variety of programs and types of support for people with any kind of dementia, their caregivers, and anyone who has a friend or family member with dementia, including:

- In person workshops and courses
- Webinars

- Support groups
- Coffee and chat groups
- The First Link® Dementia Helpline
- Minds in Motion® fitness and social program (in person and on-line)
- Support for Chinese communities
- Support for South Asian Communities
- Help finding dementia resources

Their website offers

- [Educational videos and webinars](#)
- [Information about resources](#)
- [Fact sheets, newsletters, and brochures](#) you can download on topics such as how to talk to someone with dementia, treatment options, and living alone, and dozens of other themes
- [Information about research](#)
- [News and events related to dementia](#)
- [Brochures and factsheets in Chinese, Japanese, French, Korean, Punjabi, Farsi](#)

[HealthLinkBC dementia page](#)

A complete overview of dementia causes, symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment; how to cope as the disease moves through stages; options for support including residential care; health care planning; and more. Go [directly to the video via this YouTube link](#).

Phone Support

First Link® Dementia Helpline

English: 1-800-936-6033 (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.)

Cantonese and Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007 (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu: 1-833-674-5003 (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

The First Link® Dementia Helpline is for anyone affected by dementia. Helpline staff give people the support they need when they need it. First Link is operated by the Alzheimer Society of British Columbia. Every call to the helpline is confidential.

Resources for Indigenous and First Nations Peoples

[A Gitksan Way of Knowing About Dementia](#)

Read and watch a video showing an Indigenous perspective on dementia.

Podcasts

[Call to Mind Podcast](#)

In this four-part podcast series, people living with dementia record audio diaries and conversations about their lives during the pandemic. The podcast makers say, “We hope this podcast inspires you to make your community a more friendly and supportive place for people with dementia.”

Studies

[Navigating the Path Forward for Dementia in Canada: The Landmark Study](#)

This 2020 study from the Alzheimer Society of Canada takes an in-depth look at dementia in Canada

The Magic of Music

Singing together Improves the Lives and Health of People with Dementia

Dementia treatment isn't just a medical activity that happens in a doctor's office. It can take place in the community and be a source of joy.

This is what happens at the Voices in Motion choir in Victoria, B.C. People experiencing dementia, their caregivers and friends, and high school students join together to sing and perform.

This initiative was founded in 2017 by a team of researchers from the University of Victoria. They wanted to find out how singing in a choir affects people with dementia.

This 'experiment' has proven to be remarkably successful. The researchers found out that singing with others can be a low-cost, drug-free, and fun way to help people with dementia as well as their caregivers.

Research results showed that singing in the choir slows the progression of dementia by two to three times.

Researchers also observed:

- Memory improvements for people with dementia and caregivers
- Less stress, anxiety, and depression for the person with dementia and family members
- Increased oxygen to the brain
- Increased levels of oxytocin, the “cuddle hormone” that creates feelings of connection

Also, Voices in Motion combats social isolation. Social isolation is linked to higher levels of stress hormones and inflammation, poor sleep, and a less effective immune system.

The choir is also a way to break down the stigma that is connected to dementia. The high school students in the choir learn how to communicate with people with dementia. People of different ages become friends.

Above all, singing together brings joy to the participants and creates a supportive community. Since its beginning as a research project, Voices in Motion has become an independent non-profit organization. It now runs several different choirs, both in-person and on-line.

Learn more about Voices in Motion at [its website](#) and [on YouTube](#)