



SENIOR HEALTH

Dementia

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Senility was once accepted as just another part of aging and little was done medically to alleviate the symptoms. Now doctors understand that the severity and causes of dementia can vary. All dementia involves some impairment of memory, thinking, reasoning and language. Personality changes and abnormal behavior can also occur as dementia progresses, disrupting daily activities significantly.

The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's disease. But about 10 percent of dementia sufferers are victims of a series of small strokes called transient ischemic attacks (TIAs), where certain areas of the brain tissue deteriorate. Long standing hypertension or narrowing of the arteries increases the risk of this type of dementia. When dementia is seen before age 65, it's called presenile dementia. It can be the result of a brain tumor, head injury, Alzheimer's disease or alcoholism. It's very important to have a thorough examination to determine the cause of the dementia.

SYMPTOMS OF DEMENTIA

***disrupted short- and
long-term memory***

loss of abstract thinking

impaired judgment

disruption of language skills

impaired motor activity

personality changes

CAUSES OF DEMENTIA

- Alzheimer's disease
- stroke
- hardening of the arteries
- nutritional deficiencies (especially of Vitamin B12)
- thyroid disorders
- alcoholism
- infections
- tumors
- head injury
- depression
- side effects of some medicines or medication combinations

TREATMENT

Up to 20 percent of dementia cases are reversible. Treating the underlying problem is the first step. If the cause is not known or is untreatable, the doctor may prescribe medications to control the symptoms. Antidepressants can help with insomnia and depression, which often accompany dementia. A consistent routine, appropriate activities and clear communication from caregivers can help enhance remaining skills.