



In 1983 nearly 20 years before he died of Alzheimer's disease, President Ronald Reagan helped to create greater awareness of the disease, declaring November as National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month. The Alzheimer's Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support and research.

What Is Dementia? Dementia is an overall term for diseases and conditions characterized by a decline in memory, language, problem-solving and other thinking skills that affect a person's ability to perform everyday activities. Memory loss is an example. Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia.

Dementia is not a single disease; it's an overall term — like heart disease — that covers a wide range of specific medical conditions, including Alzheimer's disease. Disorders grouped under the general term "dementia" are caused by abnormal brain changes. These changes trigger a decline in thinking skills, also known as cognitive abilities, severe enough to impair daily life and independent function. They also affect behavior, feelings and relationships. Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60 to 80 percent of cases. But there are many other conditions that can cause symptoms of dementia, including some that are reversible, such as thyroid problems and vitamin deficiencies.

Dementia is often incorrectly referred to as "senility" or "senile dementia," which reflects the formerly widespread but incorrect belief that serious mental decline is a normal part of aging.

What Is Alzheimer's Disease? Alzheimer's disease is a type of dementia that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. Symptoms usually develop slowly and get worse over time, becoming severe enough to interfere with daily tasks.

Understanding Alzheimer's and dementia

- Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia, a general term for memory loss and other cognitive abilities serious enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60 percent to 80 percent of dementia cases.
- Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging. The greatest known risk factor is increasing age, and the majority of people with Alzheimer's are 65 and older. But Alzheimer's is not just a disease of old age. Approximately 200,000 Americans under the age of 65 have younger-onset Alzheimer's disease (also known as early-onset Alzheimer's).
- Alzheimer's worsens over time. Alzheimer's is a progressive disease, where dementia symptoms gradually worsen over a number of years. In its early stages, memory loss is mild, but with late-stage Alzheimer's, individuals lose the ability to carry on a conversation and respond to their environment. Alzheimer's is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. On average, a person with Alzheimer's lives four to eight years after diagnosis, but can live as long as 20 years, depending on other factors.
- Alzheimer's has no current cure, but treatments for symptoms are available and research continues. Although current Alzheimer's treatments cannot stop Alzheimer's from progressing, they can temporarily slow the worsening of dementia symptoms and improve quality of life for those with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. Today, there is a worldwide effort under way to find better ways to treat the disease, delay its onset, and prevent it from developing.

For more information, please visit: www.alz.org