

What is Dementia?

How to talk about
it with your family
& doctor



About WIHA

- **Mission:** To improve the health and well-being of all people as we age by disseminating evidence-based programs and practices and by engaging in collaborative public health strategies in Wisconsin and beyond.
- <https://wihealthyaging.org>
- **Age Well Newsletter**



Introduction to Speakers

- Dr. Nathaniel Chin, MD





What is dementia? How to talk about it with your family and doctor.

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Medical Director, Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center & Wisconsin Registry for
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Associate Director, UW Geriatric Memory Program



**Wisconsin Alzheimer's
Disease Research Center**
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

About me

- Born and raised in Watertown, WI
- My father had dementia due to Alzheimer's disease
- I am a medical doctor specializing in older adults and Alzheimer's disease



Questions I will answer today?

- What is normal aging?
- What is dementia?
- What are the early signs of dementia?
- What can be done to help people living with dementia?
- What to expect at a doctor's office?



What is normal aging?

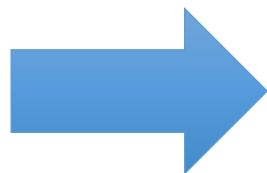
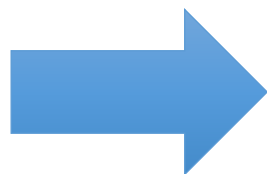
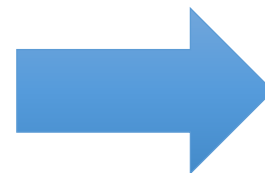
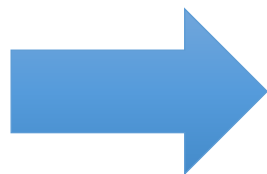
- Our brains are best around age 25-30
- We start to notice changes in our thinking around 60-65
- Most common symptoms
 - Forgetfulness of details from prior life events or experiences
 - Slowing of ability to process information
 - More difficulty in learning new information
 - More difficulty in recalling information without a cue
 - Word finding and difficulty recalling names
- Changes are subtle, not interfering with daily abilities, not happening all the time or every day

What happens in normal aging?

- Brain shrinkage (atrophy)
- Loss of connections between brain cells
- Increase in small blood vessel disease

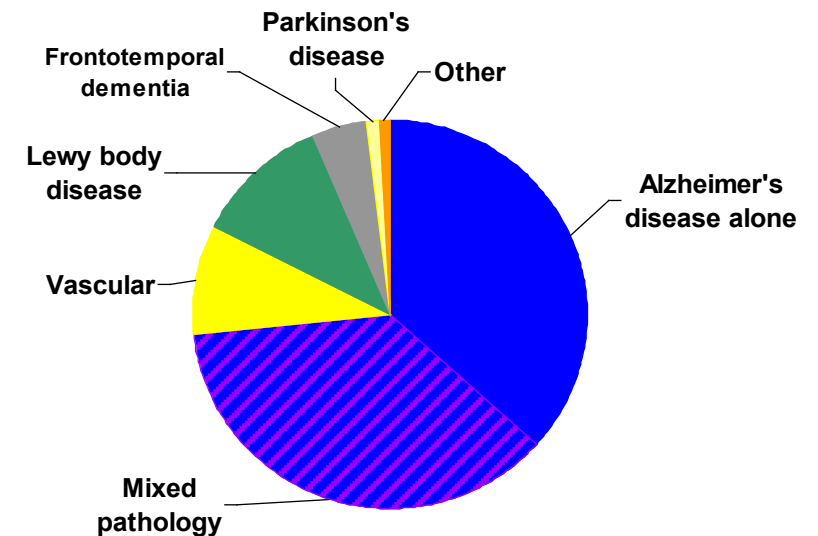


What is dementia?



Dementia is not normal aging

- Dementia is not a disease, it is the consequence of a disease
- There are 5 main brain diseases that cause dementia
 - Alzheimer's disease: Amyloid + Tau protein
 - Vascular disease: Blood vessels getting too small in the brain
 - Parkinson's disease & Lewy body disease: 2 proteins building up
 - Frontotemporal disease: 1 protein building up
- Brain diseases kill brain cells and this causes symptoms



What are the early signs of dementia?

Thinking changes

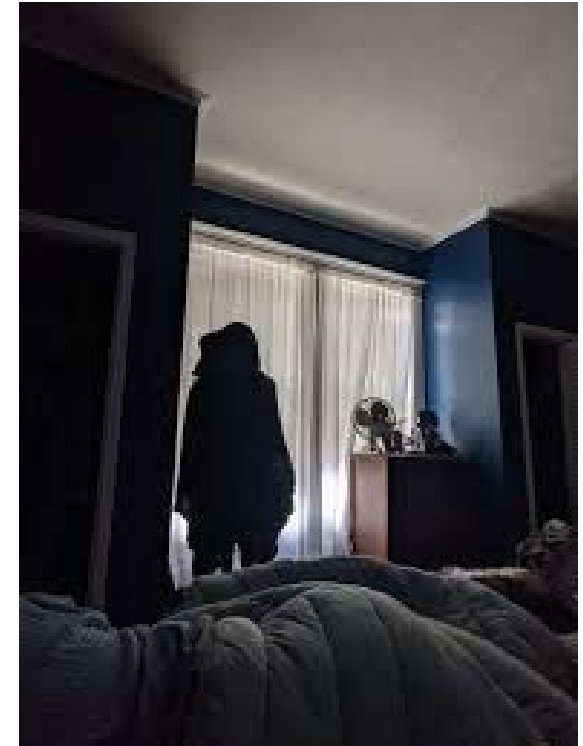
- Memory loss disrupting daily life
- Challenges in solving problems
- Confusion with time or place
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships
- Word finding, writing challenges
- Misplacing items
- Decreased judgement
- Changes in mood or personality

Changes in daily activities

- Difficulty completing familiar tasks (using the microwave / TV)
- Withdrawal from work or social activities
- Making mistakes with medications
- Struggling with financial matters
- Not keeping appointments or missing events
- Struggling with work or hobbies

Mood changes in dementia

- Early changes
 - Apathy (lacking interest or motivation to engage)
 - Sadness
 - Anxiety, worry
 - Irritability
- Later changes
 - Changes in personality
 - Paranoia
 - Hallucinations
 - Delusions
 - Agitation



What can help people with dementia?

- Getting a diagnosis
 - Help starts with understanding what is happening
- Creating a supportive environment and community
- Focus on independence and enjoyment
 - Provide assistance for abilities that have changed
- Address reversible factors and improve brain health
- Medications may be an option
- Create routines

Benefits of an early diagnosis – Patient/Family

- Can help explain symptoms, personality changes, behavioral changes
 - Provides an answer to patient and family suspicions/concerns
- Earlier interventions
 - Access to right services and support
 - Referral to community organizations and research
 - Medications
- Maintain a good quality of life

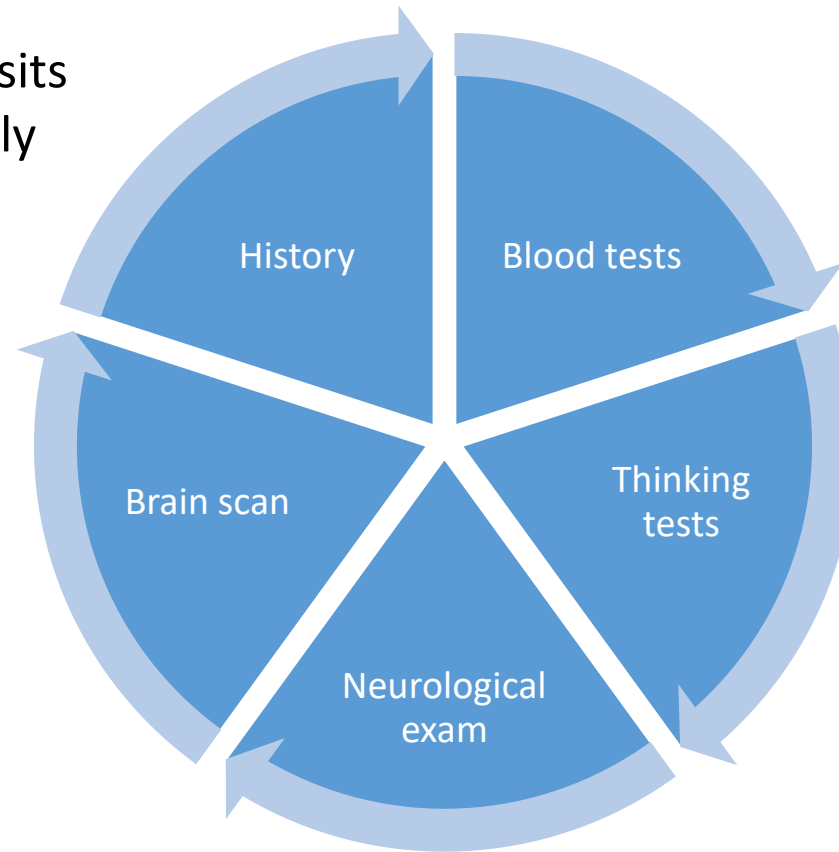


Benefits of an early diagnosis – Patient/Family

- Patients can participate in their care and discuss future care options
- Patients can participate in their own legal and financial decisions
- Helps patients and family prepare for future functional change and potential safety issues
 - Allows family members and friends to develop new roles of support
 - Avoid crisis moments
- Gives time for families and care partners to become more educated

What to expect at the doctor's office?

- Not just 1 visit but multiple visits
- History from patient and family



- Blood tests to address reversible causes of symptoms

- Brain scan is not diagnostic but can help identify blood vessel changes and shrinkage of memory center

- Thinking tests to see what degree of change is occurring
- Not all thinking tests are the same or as accurate

- Neurological exam is non-invasive and to look for Parkinson's disease

Resources available to you

- Aging and Disability Resource Centers (WI)
 - Dementia care specialists
- WI Organizations
 - Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center
 - Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute
 - UW Health Geriatric Memory Program
- National organizations
 - Alzheimer's Association
 - Alzheimer's Foundation of America
 - AARP (Global Council on Brain Health)

Feedback

- Survey upon exit of zoom
- Please share your thoughts!



Next for Age Well Series

- 2 Exciting Webinars!
 - May 20
 - June 5



Mind Matters: Navigating Mental Health in Older Adulthood

FREE Webinar

Join the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging and Wisconsin Coalition for Social Connection as we host:

- Dr. Rebecca Radue, Geriatric Psychiatrist
- Danette Hopke, Behavioral Health Program Manager, UW-Madison Division of Extension
- Mark Miller, Outreach Coordinator, 988 Wisconsin Lifeline

Learn about the importance of taking care of our mental health and tools to help us stay connected and mentally well as we age.

Tuesday, May 20, 2025

2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Virtual on Zoom

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- 2 Exciting Webinars!
 - May 20
 - June 5



Rest & Renewal: Sleep Health As We Age

FREE Webinar

Join us for an engaging and informative session with Dr. Sophiya Benjamin as she explores the sleep-related changes that often occur with aging and the common sleep problems faced by older adults. Dr. Benjamin will shed light on the science of sleep, the challenges that arise as we age, and the critical role that behavioral treatments play in effectively managing insomnia. Discover why sleep hygiene, while helpful, is often not enough on its own—and what evidence-based strategies can lead to lasting improvements in sleep quality and overall well-being.



Presenter: Dr. Sophiya Benjamin, MBBS, MHSc, FRCPC, Associate Professor, McMaster University

June 5, 2025
10-11 a.m.
Virtual on Zoom



Q&A

