

# Dementia Fact Sheet

Dementia is an “umbrella term” used to refer to the condition of people who have thinking and memory problems. Dementia is not a normal part of the aging process. There are other labels given to those who have dementia, but they all refer to problems with memory and thinking. Many people have dementia. Nearly half of all people age 85 and older are thought to have some form of dementia.

**Some of the symptoms or signs of dementia are:**

- Short-term memory loss
- Inability to think problems through
- Needing step-by-step instructions to complete a complex task
- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Paranoid, inappropriate or bizarre behavior

**Some causes of dementia can be treated and some cannot.**

**Some of the causes which can be treated to reverse symptoms are listed below:**

- |  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Reaction to medication                         | Emotional Distress              |
| Metabolic disturbances                         | Problems with vision or hearing |
| Endocrine abnormalities                        | Nutritional deficiencies        |
| Infections                                     | Brain tumor                     |
| Blood clot on the surface of the brain         |                                 |
| Pressure inside the brain from fluid build up  |                                 |
| Hardening of the arteries or “atherosclerosis” |                                 |

**Some causes of dementia cannot be reversed.**

Some cases of injury to the brain from a fall or accident

Diseases which cause the brain to degenerate such as:

- |                                       |                             |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Alzheimer’s disease (the most common) |                             |
| Lewy bodies disease                   | Parkinson’s disease         |
| Huntington’s chorea disease           | Pick’s disease              |
| Stroke                                | Loss of oxygen to the brain |
| AIDS                                  | Creutzfeld-Jakob’s disease  |
| Multiple sclerosis                    | Binswanger disease          |

**For diagnosis, a doctor can use medical and neuropsychological evaluations, as well as brain scans.** The cause of some dementias can be established. In other cases, diagnosis involves ruling out causes and looking closely at symptoms. Sometimes an autopsy is required to absolutely establish diagnosis.

**Caring for someone who has dementia is a very demanding role.** Caregivers need support for themselves, new skills to handle problematic behaviors, strategies for safety, and knowledge about how to take care of themselves while caring for someone else. The Alabama CARES REACH Project is designed to help family members in the caregiving role.