

## Dementia Myths & Facts

Below are 15 statements about dementia. Some are true, and some are false. You can read further below to see the answers for which are true and which are false.

1. Dementia is not a normal part of aging.
2. People with dementia ask the same questions over and over again on purpose.
3. People with dementia who are aggressive may act this way because they feel scared, confused, or frustrated.
4. Urinary tract infections, dehydration, and constipation can make memory and mood problems worse in people with dementia.
5. When a person with dementia cannot understand something even after it has been explained several times, it can help to change the subject.
6. When a person with dementia gets angry, it can help to leave the room for a few minutes.
7. My family member has dementia. This means that I will get dementia, too.
8. Genetic tests will let me know if I will get dementia.
9. People younger than 65 can get dementia.
10. Dementia cannot be cured with medications.
11. Vitamins and supplements can prevent or cure dementia.
12. A diagnosis of dementia means that life is over.
13. Research has proven that everyday exposure to the metal in soda cans or dental fillings can cause dementia.
14. Dementia turns into Alzheimer's disease.
15. This morning I lost my keys and then I forgot my grocery list. This means that I am getting dementia.

1. Dementia is not a normal part of aging.

**TRUE.** As people get older, some changes in memory and thinking are normal. For example, older adults process new information more slowly and have a harder time multi-tasking. But dementia is not a normal part of aging. It is a disease that causes brain cells to stop working properly or die. Over time, people with dementia lose the ability to do basic activities, like bathe and dress themselves. Currently, experts do not know why some people get dementia and other people do not. Factors like diabetes, high blood pressure, and a family history can increase a person's risk for dementia. But they increase the risk only by a small amount.

2. People with dementia ask the same questions over and over again on purpose.

**FALSE.** Many caregivers feel frustrated by the need to repeat themselves when speaking to their care partner with dementia. It is important for caregivers to remember that it is the disease that causes their family member or friend to repeat themselves. People with dementia are doing the best they can. But the changes in their brain make it hard for them to absorb information and form new memories.

3. People with dementia who are aggressive may act this way because they feel scared, confused, or frustrated.

**TRUE.** Not all people with dementia are aggressive, but it is a fairly common problem. About 1 in 5 people with dementia show aggressive behaviors. Some people with dementia are aggressive because they feel an unpleasant emotion and cannot communicate it in a different way. If you have concerns about your care partner's behavior, it is important to talk to their doctor for guidance.

4. Urinary tract infections, dehydration, and constipation can make memory and mood problems worse in people with dementia.

**TRUE.** A person with dementia may not be able to communicate that they are not feeling well. It is important that caregivers watch for changes in their care partner like increased confusion or irritable mood. Even if the person looks healthy, these changes may indicate that something is wrong. It is important that caregivers let the person's doctor know when these changes occur.

5. When a person with dementia cannot understand something even after it has been explained several times, it can help to change the subject.

**TRUE.** In these situations, it is important for caregivers to remain calm. It is not recommended that they lose their temper or continue trying to explain. This will not help their care partner understand and may lead to an argument. Instead, it may be helpful to change the topic or introduce a new activity to get the person's mind focused on something different.

6. When a person with dementia gets angry, it can help to leave the room for a few minutes.

**TRUE.** It is helpful for caregivers to remain calm in these situations. It is not recommended that they argue back or lose their temper. Strategies like changing the subject or leaving the room can be helpful. If a person with dementia gets irritated frequently, it may help to reduce the noise or other stimulation around them. Strategies like turning the volume down on the television or radio, keeping a regular routine, and finding a quiet and familiar space for them may help.

7. My family member has dementia. This means that I will get dementia, too.

**FALSE.** People who have parents or siblings with dementia have a slightly higher chance of getting dementia themselves. But there are many other factors that can affect whether a person develops dementia. For example, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and old age may raise a person's risk for dementia. On the other hand, keeping a healthy weight, regular exercise, and avoiding smoking may lower a person's risk for dementia. Currently, experts do not know why some people get dementia and other people do not.

8. Genetic tests will let me know if I will get dementia.

**FALSE.** For the majority of people, genetic tests are not helpful in determining dementia risk. If you have concerns about your risk for dementia, it may help to talk to your doctor. Your doctor may be able to help you decide if genetic testing is right for you.

9. People younger than 65 can get dementia.

**TRUE.** Most people with dementia are over the age of 65. But in rare

cases, people in their 30s, 40s, and 50s can get dementia. This is called

early onset dementia. People with early onset dementia commonly report problems with reading, finding words in conversation, and making decisions. They may notice these problems when they cannot complete tasks at work or at home.

10. Dementia cannot be cured with medications.

**TRUE.** Currently, there is no cure for dementia. Research has shown that some medications can slow the worsening of dementia symptoms. These medications only work for a limited time. They also do not work for everyone. Even with medications, people with dementia will have the disease for the rest of their lives, and their symptoms will get worse over time.

11. Vitamins and supplements can prevent or cure dementia.

**FALSE.** Some people believe that vitamins and supplements can improve memory. Examples include coconut oil, coral calcium, and omega-3 fatty acids. But there is not enough scientific evidence to recommend any of these products for dementia. Some vitamins and supplements can be harmful when taken together with medication. If you or your care partner are interested in taking vitamins or supplements, it is important to talk to a doctor before starting them.

12. A diagnosis of dementia means that life is over.

**FALSE.** Although there is no cure for dementia, people with dementia can continue to live meaningful lives. On average, people live for 8 to 10 years after receiving a diagnosis of dementia, but this can vary. People with dementia can stay healthy and independent for longer when they keep active, eat a balanced diet, and get support from their family, friends, and communities.

13. Research has proven that everyday exposure to the metal in soda cans or dental fillings can cause dementia.

**FALSE.** The human body takes in very small amounts of metals like aluminum, copper, mercury, and silver during everyday activities. In fact, the body needs very small amounts of metals to function properly. Metals are a health risk only when people are exposed to them in large amounts. There is no strong scientific evidence that everyday exposure to metals causes dementia or other health problems. Additionally, some people

believe that getting the flu shot or eating artificial sweeteners can cause dementia. There is also no convincing evidence that these activities cause dementia or other health problems.

14. Dementia turns into Alzheimer's disease.

**FALSE.** Dementia is not a stage of Alzheimer's disease. Dementia is a broad term for a group of diseases that cause memory loss and other changes and get worse over time. There are many types of dementias. Another common belief is that Alzheimer's disease turns into dementia. This is also false. Alzheimer's disease is a specific type of dementia. Some other common types of dementia are vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, and frontotemporal dementia.

15. This morning I lost my keys and then I forgot my grocery list. This means that I am getting dementia.

**FALSE.** It is normal for people to forget things from time to time. But people with dementia have more serious changes in memory that affect their ability to do normal activities. For example, a person who is usually responsible and on time may start missing appointments or important deadlines on a regular basis. If a person has concerns about their memory, it is important that they talk to their doctor for guidance.