

7 Misconceptions

About People with Dementia



Although dementia awareness has greatly increased in recent years, and people are more educated about Alzheimer's and other types of dementia now more than ever, misconceptions about dementia are still prevalent.

Those who haven't experienced or seen the disease up close can easily believe these misconceptions, furthering the stigma around dementia. This is why it's important to know the common misconceptions about people with dementia and what the truth is.

The less dementia is stigmatized, the more accepting and understanding we can be of those who have it. The more understanding we are, the better we will be able to understand this disease for what it really is, conduct proper research and develop effective medications and preventative treatments.

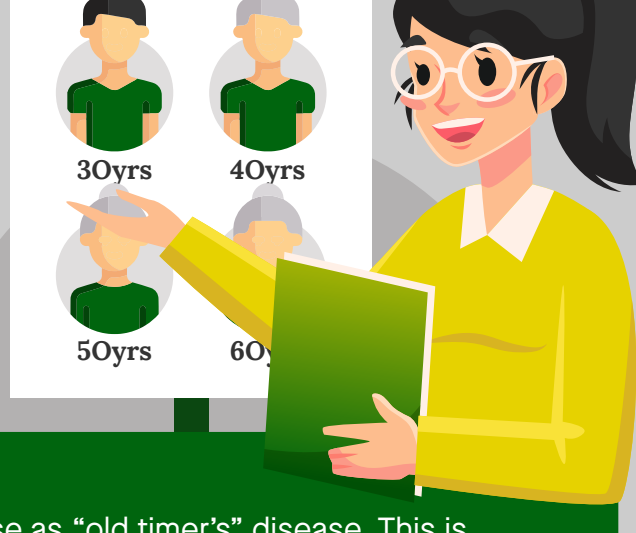
#1 Misconception

Dementia only happens to older people.

✓ Truth

You've probably heard people refer to Alzheimer's disease as "old timer's" disease. This is based on the stigma that only older adults get dementia. This simply isn't true.

Early onset dementia can occur in people as young as their thirties. Young-onset Alzheimer's disease typically begins when someone is in their fifties. Frontotemporal degeneration, another form of dementia, can also start at an earlier age.



#2 Misconception

Dementia is caused by aging.

✓ Truth

Dementia is not a normal part of aging or simply caused by getting older. Many people age into their eighties and nineties without getting dementia.

Dementia is caused by neurodegeneration in the brain.

A number of factors can contribute to this, including

- ✓ head injury,
- ✓ diabetes, and
- ✓ stroke.

Some memory loss is common with aging, but not the type of memory loss caused by dementia. This type of memory loss is debilitating and ultimately fatal, as the brain will eventually no longer be able to function.



#3 Misconception

Dementia is hereditary.

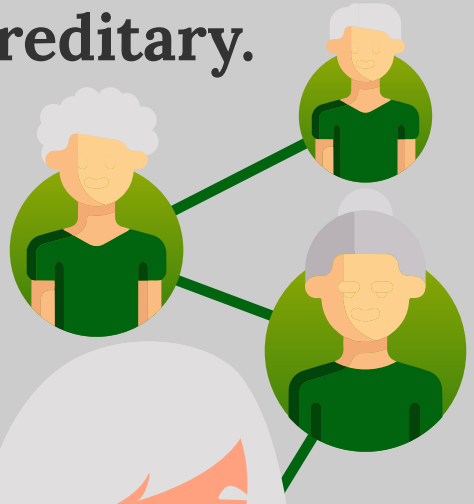
✓ Truth

Just because your parent or grandparent had dementia or Alzheimer's does not mean you will get it too.

Less than 5% of people living with Alzheimer's inherited it through a family member.

While there are certain gene mutations that can put you at higher risk for Alzheimer's, having one of these mutations does not guarantee you will get it.

Early-onset Alzheimer's and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, another form of dementia, are more strongly linked to genetics.



#4 Misconception

People with dementia are unaware of the world around them.

✓ Truth

People with early-stage dementia have mild symptoms and are able to make decisions for themselves, take care of themselves and function well. People in the more progressive stages of dementia may seem confused or like they don't know what's going on, but they are still people who deserve respect, and they are probably aware of more than you think. They just need to be communicated with differently so they can respond effectively.



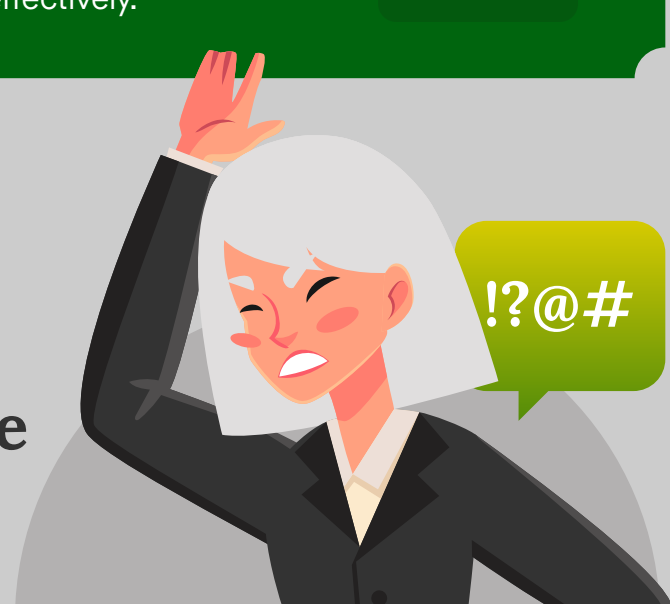
#5 Misconceptions

People with dementia are violent or aggressive.

✓ Truth

If someone with dementia is acting violent or aggressive, it is likely a sign of an unmet need that they're not able to communicate effectively. Violence and aggression aren't symptoms of dementia. Changes in the brain and behavior are, so the violence and aggression are stemming from those changes and the confusion caused by dementia.

If you are around someone who has dementia and has an aggressive outburst, find out what is causing this person to feel distressed then do what you need to do to take away that cause and restore calm to his or her environment.



#6 Misconception

If you are diagnosed with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia, you will decline rapidly, and your quality of life will suffer.

✓ Truth

Dementia affects everyone differently. Some people live many quality years after receiving a diagnosis. Others decline rapidly. It typically depends on when the neurodegeneration began, which is often unknown. But just because you have a diagnosis, doesn't mean your life is over. There are many things you can do to maintain your quality of life as you progress through the disease.

Making brain-healthy choices can help slow down the disease and add good years to your life. The brain-healthy choices we listed above a healthy diet, getting regular exercise, maintaining an active social life and continuing to challenge your brain.



#7 Misconception

If I eat ___ or do ___ or take ___, I can prevent dementia.

✓ Truth

There is no conclusive evidence that a certain diet, behavior, medication, vitamin or supplement will guarantee you won't get dementia. But there are behaviors that can reduce your risk of developing the disease. The brain-healthy choices we listed above all contribute to helping reduce your risk of getting dementia or Alzheimer's in addition to getting enough sleep, managing your stress and not smoking.

