



Living Well with AIMGA

VOL. 9 - DEMENTIA AND ALZHEIMER'S
AWARENESS

Compiled by AIMGA's Health and Wellness Team

**HEALTHHUB FOR
NEWCOMERS**



Health Matters! Wellness Matters! Diversity Matters!

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SEPTEMBER: Dementia and Alzheimer's Awareness



According to Alzheimer's Disease International, "dementia is a collective name for brain syndromes which affect memory, thinking, behaviour and emotion, and is the leading cause of disability and dependency among the elderly". Alzheimer's Disease is a type of dementia; it is a chronic neurodegenerative disease that destroys brain cells, causing thinking ability and memory to deteriorate over time. Currently, there is estimated to be over 55 million people globally living with dementia. Given that this dementia is especially common in the elderly population, it is anticipated that the prevalence of diagnoses will continue to increase as Canada's population ages. September marks World Alzheimer's Month, so join us in reading this Living Well with AIMGA Volume 9 newsletter to learn more on this subject. This content is written by international medical graduates of AIMGA who have expertise in these areas.

Sources: [Alzheimer's Disease International](#); [Health Canada, 2022](#); [Alzheimer Society, 2023](#); [Alzheimer's Association, 2023](#)

Alzheimer's is a **Type** of Dementia

ALZHEIMER'S
is a specific brain disease that accounts for **60-80%** of dementia cases.



DEMENTIA
is a general term for symptoms like decline in **memory, reasoning or other thinking skills.**

Alzheimer's is a **Cause** of Dementia

HOT TOPIC: ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



Dementia is a chronic neurodegenerative condition resulting from the ongoing and irreversible death of brain cells. It involves the progressive loss of mental and, ultimately, physical functions in affected individuals. Alzheimer's disease (AD) is the most common form, accounting for 60-80% of all cases of dementia. According to the World Health Organization, dementia is the seventh leading cause of death and one of the major causes of disability and dependency among older people globally.

Progressive brain cell death causes shrinkage (atrophy) of different parts of the brain, and connections between cells in different parts of the brain are also disrupted. This results in deterioration of the ability to form new memory, deficits in logical thinking and planning, getting lost in space and time, language difficulty, personality changes, and confusion. AD starts in the brain many years before symptoms are expressed.

AD is commonly diagnosed in individuals aged over 65 years but can occur in younger individuals (younger-onset dementia). Dementia differs from aging in that there is a slowing in thinking along with physical functions in aging whereas the progressive decline in dementia causes changes affecting not only memory but also cognitive function.

Non-modifiable risk factors include age, family history, and genetic makeup. Only 1% of AD are genetic (familial), 30% of AD may be attributable to potentially modifiable risk factors including hypertension, type 2 diabetes mellitus, high cholesterol, BMI, overweight and obesity, smoking, and sedentary living.

There are 3 stages of dementia. Symptoms vary depending on the stage of the individual's disease. In stage 1, there are mild cognitive changes commonly memory, judgment, planning difficulties, mood changes, and irritability. In stage 2 (moderate dementia) there is a ramping up of earlier symptoms, more psychological and behavioral symptoms. Perception and awareness of danger get limited; they may forget the way home, lack insight to ask for directions, or experience incontinence. Individuals with stage 3 (advanced dementia) have progressively more physical difficulties, loss of muscle function, changes in mobility and function (e.g., feeding, hygiene maintenance, difficulty in swallowing, and double incontinence).

Dementia is incurable. Treatment is often to delay symptom onset, reduce symptoms and enhance the quality of life. Early diagnosis can help people and their families plan for their future. Drugs may be prescribed that increase the levels of an important chemical transmitter (acetylcholine) in the brain; some may be needed to control psychiatric symptoms, physical symptoms, etc. Non-pharmacological interventions include reality orientation, validation, sensory gardens, reminiscence therapy, doll therapy, changes to the environment (i.e., dementia-inclusive design such as creating a familiar place, providing a variety of places to be alone, lighting, allowing people to see and be seen, using contrasting toilet seats, physical touch, exposure to nice music, visits from family, pet therapy, use of clocks or pill boxes with alarms, and social connection.

Management in stage 1 is aimed at maintaining autonomy and independence including healthcare planning, making a will, social activities, hobbies, and engagement in meaningful activities. In stage 2, the focus is on safety (e.g., assistance /companionship to do activities like cooking, going for walks, and supports to continue to live at home). In stage 3, the focus is on the comfort of the individual and the relief of symptoms (e.g., hygiene and skin health, pressure-relieving devices and positioning, modifications of diet, and palliative care).

Sources: [Alzheimer Society, 2023](#), [2021](#); [Health Canada, 2022](#); [Douglas, James, and Ballard, 2018](#); [Alzheimer's Association, 2023](#)

RED FLAGS

- 1 See this link for more [early warning signs](#) of Alzheimer's Disease.
- 2 Recognizing red flags can really help those with AD and their families proactively address symptoms. It is especially important to be aware of **mobility issues**, such as gait and imbalance, which can increase the risk of falling. Consult your family physician if you are concerned for one's everyday safety. Steps to modify your household to prevent risk can be found [here](#).
- 3 If someone is at immediate risk of harm due to confusion, call 9-1-1.
- 4 Six in ten people who live with dementia are at risk of getting lost. Here are some tips on achieving [independence and safety](#).

Sources: [Memorial Hermann, 2023](#); [National Institute on Aging, 2017](#); [Alzheimer Society, 2022](#)

Resources & Tips to get Started

- Learn more about dementia ([Alzheimer's Disease International](#); [Health Canada](#))
- [Dementia vs Alzheimer's: What is the Difference](#)
- **Everyday task tips:** Write down to-do lists, appointments, and events in a notebook or calendar; Set up automated bill payments; Have your groceries delivered; Manage your medications with a weekly pillbox, a pillbox with reminders (like an alarm), or a medication dispenser.
- **Sleep tips:** Keep a telephone with emergency numbers by your bed; Have a lamp that's easy to reach and turn on, a nightlight in the hallway or bathroom, and a flashlight nearby; Develop a relaxing bedtime routine with lowered lights, cool temperature, and no electronic screens; Avoid caffeine and naps late in the day.
- **Healthy lifestyle tips:** Regular exercise; Good diet such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean sources of protein and dairy products. Avoid added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium; Stay social by talking on the phone with family and friends, joining an online support group, or going for a walk in your neighborhood.
- **Caregiver tips:** Tips for Caregivers: 1) Ask for help when needed; this could be asking family members or friends to help or reaching out to local services; 2) Eat a balanced diet; 3) Join a caregiver's support group; this will give you a chance to share stories and ideas and can help keep you from feeling isolated; 4) Take breaks each day, spend time with friends, and keep up with hobbies; 5) Exercise as often as you can; try doing yoga, going for a walk, or practicing meditation. Research suggests that practicing meditation may reduce blood pressure, anxiety, depression, and insomnia; and 6) Consider seeking help from mental health professionals to help you cope with stress and anxiety. Talk with your doctor about finding treatment.
- **Caregiver Resources:** [First Steps for Families](#) (outlines steps family members can take to learn how to support the person with dementia); [Reducing Caregiver Stress](#) (provides suggestions to help caregivers give the best possible support while taking care of themselves); [Ways to Help](#) (gives suggestions for helping people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers); [5 Communication Tips](#) for conversations with people living with dementia

DID YOU KNOW?

- Did you know studies have shown that **music** can reduce agitation and improve behavioural issues that can occur in those living with the disease. Even in the later stages of Alzheimer's, a person may be able to sway to a beat or sing a song from their childhood. Music can allow for a way for those with Alzheimer's to connect, even after verbal communication has become difficult.
- Did you know that engaging in **art projects** can create a sense of accomplishment and purpose for those living with dementia? They can provide the person — as well as caregivers — an opportunity for self-expression and creativity.
- You can use [these tips](#) to select music or plan an art project for someone with dementia.
- Did you know that **touch and physical contact** is important for those living with dementia? Research has shown that human contact reduces blood pressure, pain, improves mood and helps to calm dementia patients. You can provide touch by: offering hand lotion massage, combing and brushing hair, giving shoulder hugs, high 5s, or handshakes, or offering assistance when walking.

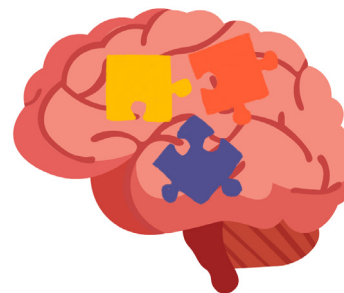
Sources: [Alzheimers.gov](#); [Alzheimer's Disease International](#); [Alzheimers.gov](#); [Dorson Home Care, 2019](#)



HEALTH REMINDERS!

- If you experience early symptoms of dementia (e.g., memory loss, difficulty performing familiar tasks, or changes in personality), find a doctor you feel comfortable with to openly discuss your concerns.
- A large body of research now strongly suggests that combining healthy habits, such as staying active physically and mentally, eating a healthy and balanced diet, getting enough sleep, avoiding tobacco and excess alcohol, reducing stress, wearing a seat belt/helmet, preventing falls and brain injury, and stimulating the brain through activities and games, promotes good brain health and reduces your risk of cognitive decline.
- If you are a caregiver looking after one with dementia or Alzheimer's, it is important to take care of yourself and your own health (mental and physical) to avoid caregiver burnout. Check out these [caregiver resources](#) to assist you and your family / loved ones.
- Work with your doctor to monitor your heart health and treat any problems, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol or obesity issues; there is strong evidence linking heart health to brain health. Try out these lifestyle tips [here](#).

Sources: [Alzheimer's Association, 2023](#); <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/diagnosis/visiting-your-doctor>; https://www.alz.org/help-support/brain_health; [Alzheimer's Society, 2023](#); [Alzheimer's Association, 2023](#)



MYTH OR FACT?

Sources: [National Institute on Aging, 2023](#); [Alzheimer Society, 2023](#); [Roberts, 2021](#)

Click on each myth bubble to find out true, evidence-based information.

Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease are the same.

Dementia and Alzheimer's are genetic conditions that we inherit from our parents.

Dementia is a symptom and sign of aging.

There is no treatment for Alzheimer's or dementia.

Official diagnosis is only be possible after death by autopsy.



COMMUNITY RESOURCES & ORGANIZATIONS

- [Alzheimer Society of Canada](#)
- [Alzheimer's Association](#)
- [CareGiver Action Network](#)
- [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#)
- [Canadian Institute for Health Information](#)
- [Baycrest](#)
- [Canadian Dementia Learning and Resource Network](#)



IMG SPOTLIGHT



Rafaela Magalhaes

Rafaela Magalhaes is an International Neurologist currently working in dementia research at UBC. Rafaela's medical training and subsequent specialization took place in Brazil. Her pursuit of knowledge has led her across borders, as her fourth year of medical school was in Bordeaux, France, and a month of her residency training was in Toronto. Rafaela started her Canadian professional journey at a chronic pain clinic in Vancouver, where she empowers patients through education. She offers two impactful courses: an enlightening 8-week course about Brain Health, and a comprehensive 4-week course about Persistent Headache and Neck Pain, both of which she continues to teach. Rafaela is also a Rater for Clinical Trials at a research clinic in Vancouver, which encompasses clinical trials related to Alzheimer's disease and bipolar disorder.

Skills gained from AIMGA:

"The biggest lesson I've learned while pursuing my career is the importance of adaptability, flexibility, and a willingness to learn and grow, which ensures that I continue to progress and achieve my goals. Becoming a physician in another country is challenging, but it will be rewarding if that's your true passion. Stay resilient! Remember why you started, celebrate progress, be patient, and keep your passion alive."

Biggest Lesson Learned & Advice for Other IMGs:

"AIMGA not only enabled me to see the bigger picture, but also guided me with clear direction, organized my studies and applications effectively, and provided essential courses and materials. Thanks to their support, I maintained a strong focus, and unwavering drive throughout this demanding and possible journey."



WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARENESS DAY - SEPTEMBER 10

Purpose:

Designated as a way of focusing attention on mental health promotion and suicide prevention.

Key Facts:

- First launched in 2003 by the International Association for Suicide Prevention.
- Every year, approximately 4,500 people in Canada die by suicide, which is equivalent to 12 people dying by suicide every day
- Through action, you can make a difference to someone in their darkest moments – as a member of society, as a child, as a parent, as a friend, as a colleague or as a neighbour.

Additional Links:

<https://suicideprevention.ca>; <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-suicide-prevention-day/2022>



PROSTATE CANCER MONTH

Purpose:

To increase awareness and share the “must-knows” involving prostate cancer.

Key Facts:

- Prostate cancer is most commonly diagnosed in Canadian men (1 in 9).
- The risk of developing prostate cancer increases with age, most of the time it happens after age 50.
- Most prostate cancers grow slowly and don't cause any health problems.
- [Please click here](#) for the signs and symptoms.

Additional Links:

<https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/prostate>, <https://cancer.ca/en/about-us/prostate-cancer>



OVARIAN CANCER MONTH

Purpose:

To take action against ovarian cancer until the number of deaths from this disease is zero.

Key Facts:

- Ovarian cancer impacts 1 in 75 Canadian women. An estimated 3,000 women were diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2022 in Canada
- The most common first symptoms of ovarian cancer are bloating, abdominal/pelvic pain or discomfort, difficulty eating or feeling full quickly, and urinary changes.
- [Please click here](#) for the signs and symptoms.

Additional Links:

<https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/prostate>, <https://cancer.ca/en/about-us/prostate-cancer>



CHILDHOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Purpose:

To raise awareness about childhood cancer and support families of children with cancer financially.

Key Facts:

- Between 250 et 300 children aged 18 and younger are diagnosed with cancer.
- Zoé4life is a non-profit organization that supports children with cancer, their families, and research.
- Please click here for the signs and symptoms.

Additional Links:

<https://zoe4life.org>, <https://www.childhoodcancer.ca>



TERRY FOX RUN MONTH

Purpose:

It is a foundation to inspire people around the world to support and fundraise for extraordinary research to end cancer.

Key Facts:

- Terry Fox was diagnosed with bone cancer in his right leg in 1977 and had his leg amputated 15 cm above the knee. While in the hospital, Terry was so overcome by the suffering of other cancer patients that he decided to run across Canada to raise money for cancer research. He called his journey the Marathon of Hope.
- For over four decades, The Terry Fox Foundation has worked to achieve Terry's vision.

Additional Links:

<https://terryfox.org>; <https://www.tfri.ca/about/terry-fox>

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AIMGA



AIMGA CALGARY



Crescent Centre
Suite 202
1409 Edmonton Trail NE
Calgary, AB T2E 3K8



403.520.7730

AIMGA EDMONTON



106 Street Tower Building
Suite 420
10055 106 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T5J 2Y2



587.524.2750



www.aimga.ca