



About dementia *Mō te mate wareware*

What is dementia? *He aha te mate wareware?*

Dementia is a term used to describe a group of symptoms associated with changes in how our brains work.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia. Dementia can affect anyone, and as people get older the chances of developing dementia increase.

The symptoms each person experiences depends on the parts of the brain that are affected. However, the most common dementia symptoms include changes in memory, thinking, behaviour, personality, and emotions. These changes can affect a person's ability to perform everyday tasks and may interfere with their everyday lives.

Dementia is progressive, which means that for most people the changes gradually spread through the brain and lead to the symptoms getting worse.

Dementia is different for everyone – what they experience, and how quickly they are affected.

If you are concerned that you or someone you know may have dementia, take action by seeing your family doctor for a full assessment. For support and more information you can contact your local Alzheimers or Dementia organisation, ring 0800 004 001, or visit www.alzheimers.org.nz

Early symptoms *Ngā tohumate tōmua*

The early signs and symptoms of dementia can be subtle and hard to recognise. Many conditions, such as stroke, depression and infections, as well as normal ageing, can cause dementia-like symptoms. It's important not to assume changes are due to dementia. It's also very important to see a doctor if concerned. Symptoms may be caused by a treatable condition.

If symptoms are caused by dementia, an early diagnosis means access to support, information, and any appropriate medication. There is also time to plan for the future.

Forms of dementia *Ngā āhua o te mate wareware*

There are many different diseases that cause the symptoms of dementia and, for most people, there's no known reason why they develop. Some of the most common forms of dementia are:

Alzheimer's disease *Te mate Alzheimer's*

This is the most common form of dementia - around two-thirds of people with dementia have Alzheimer's disease. Although we are still learning about the causes, there are typical changes seen in the brain such as shrinkage and a build up of abnormal proteins (plaques and tangles).

Vascular dementia *Te mate wareware ā-iaia toto*

This is the second most common form of dementia caused by poor blood supply to the brain as a result of a stroke or several mini-strokes, or by blood vessel disease in the brain. The symptoms can begin suddenly after a stroke or gradually as disease in the blood vessels worsen. People can have a combination of vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Lewy Body disease *Mate Lewy Body*

This disease is characterised by the presence of 'Lewy Bodies', abnormal clumps of protein in the brain. These cause changes in movement, thinking, behaviour and alertness. There can be fluctuations between almost normal functioning and severe confusion within short periods of time. People may also have hallucinations, seeing things that aren't really there.

Frontotemporal dementia *Mate wareware whakamua-rahirahinga*

Frontotemporal dementia is a group of conditions which affect the frontal and/or temporal lobes of the brain. Frontal lobe involvement affects motivation, planning and organising, controlling emotions and maintaining socially appropriate behaviour. Temporal lobe involvement affects speaking and/or understanding language. Symptoms often begin in a person's 50s or 60s.

Family links with dementia *Ngā hononga whānau ki te mate wareware*

Some forms of dementia can have family links, which means they may be inheritable. About a third of people with Alzheimer's disease have a close relative (parent, brother or sister) who has, or has had, this disease. This does not necessarily mean dementia is inherited and for many people there's no family history.

For any concerns about a family history of dementia, please talk to your family doctor. Remember, there are many other treatable reasons for memory lapses, confusion and forgetfulness.

Memory lapses versus memory loss *Te makere hinengaro ki te ngaronga mahara*

It is important to understand what is dementia and what isn't. We all forget things from time to time and often complain our memory isn't what it used to be, but this doesn't necessarily mean we're getting dementia.

The booklet *About Dementia: A guide for people diagnosed with dementia* provides information on:

- what dementia is
- the early warning signs and diagnosis
- brain health and risk reduction
- what support is available and future planning

Go to www.alzheimers.org.nz/information-and-support
for more information

This information sheet provides a general summary only of the subject matter covered and is not a substitute for informed professional advice. Any person with dementia or their carer or family/whānau should seek professional advice about their individual situation. Alzheimers New Zealand is not liable for any error or omission in this publication, as a result of negligence or otherwise. This information sheet was produced in September 2019.