

Boulder Dementia Care To Keep You Safe

The Difference Between Alzheimer's & Dementia

Although many people use the terms "Alzheimer's" and "dementia" synonymously, they are in fact different. Alzheimer's is actually a form of dementia characterized by memory loss in older people. Dementia is the gradual loss of intellectual function. Alzheimer's statistics show that the disease can strike a person as early as 45, while dementia is more common after age 70.

Alzheimer's disease is defined as a form of dementia characterized by the gradual loss of several important mental functions. Alzheimer's disease accounts for approximately 70% of all dementia. Whereas those suffering from dementia often experience normal forgetfulness – the location of car keys or confusion about phone numbers -- signs of Alzheimer's disease include memory loss that is much more severe and more serious, such as forgetting the names of your children or confusion about whether you just ate or not.

Another way to compare Alzheimer's versus dementia is to realize that dementia is a medical term used to describe a number of conditions characterized by the gradual loss of intellectual function. Dementia is not a disease itself but rather a group of symptoms that are caused by various diseases or conditions. Certain symptoms, as defined by the American Medical Association, of dementia include memory impairment, increased language difficulties, decreased motor skills, failure to recognize or identify objects, and disturbance of the ability to plan or think abstractly.

Why is it so important to know the difference between Alzheimer's disease and dementia? So you can get to the source of the dementia and have it treated accordingly. Because Alzheimer's disease is just one of the causes of dementia. The number two cause of dementia is high blood pressure and high cholesterol often resulting from stroke or brain lesions that can impair blood flow to the brain. And the third most common cause of dementia is Parkinson's disease, Huntington's Disease and Pick's Disease. This is not to say that everyone who has Parkinson's disease will develop dementia, but some do, usually during the later stages of Parkinson's. It is important to get an accurate diagnosis of the cause of the dementia so treatment to slow the progression can be started as early as possible.

If you suspect that your elderly parent has either of these conditions, consult your doctor.

What Are the Symptoms of Dementia?

You start a sentence, pause, and then can't remember what you were saying. And where did you leave your cell phone? What was the name of that park you just visited?

We attribute this to normal forgetfulness. But when does memory loss become something more? When do words like "dementia" and "Alzheimer's" become part of the picture?

Before you rush to the doctor's, remember that some memory loss is common with aging.

The symptoms of dementia can vary from person to person, but definitely become more pronounced with age. The numbers and statistics surrounding dementia are staggering. Worldwide, there are now an estimated 24 million people living with some form of dementia. Without a major medical breakthrough in the fight against dementia, this number could jump to as many as 84 million who have age-related memory loss by the year 2040.

Currently, more than five million Americans suffer from Alzheimer's, and it is the seventh leading cause of death in the U.S. About 13% of Americans over the age of 65 have Alzheimer's and half of those over age 85 will develop Alzheimer's -- or a closely related dementia.

The symptoms and signs

So what are the signs to look for? Most people affected by dementia have some (but not all) of these symptoms. The symptoms may be very obvious, or they may be very subtle and go unrecognized for some time:

- Difficulty recalling recent events
- Disorientation to time and place
- Difficulty performing calculations
- Difficult making plans or thinking ahead
- Changing moods and behavior leading to increased agitation and aggression
- Carelessness in personal hygiene
- Disinterest in usual activities

Because some causes of dementia can be treated, is it extremely important you get an accurate diagnosis. The frequency of "treatable" causes of dementia is believed to be about 20%.

Which Dementias Are Treatable?

- Dementia due to long-term substance abuse.
- Tumors that can be removed.
- Subdural hematoma, accumulation of blood beneath the outer covering of the brain is the result of a broken blood vessel, usually the result of a head injury.
- Normal-pressure hydrocephalus.
- Metabolic disorders, such as a vitamin B12 deficiency.
- Hypothyroidism, a condition that results from an underactive thyroid.
- Hypoglycemia, a condition that results from low blood sugar.

What Are Some of the Untreatable Causes of Dementia?

- Alzheimer's disease.
- Multi-infarct dementia (Dementia due to multiple small strokes).
- Dementias associated with Parkinson's disease and similar disorders.
- AIDS dementia complex.
- Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD), a quickly progressing and fatal disease that consists of dementia and muscle twitching and spasm

Many people who suffer from dementia are not even aware they have a problem. Most people with dementia are brought to medical attention by a caring relative or friend. If you are reading this article, chances are you are concerned that you, a parent, a loved one or friend are experiencing symptoms of dementia. And that where FirstLight HomeCare Boulder comes in.

How to Survive and Thrive With Dementia

The word "dementia" or "Alzheimer's" is scary. In fact the word itself – dementia – comes from the Latin

word for madness. Many people are afraid to go to the doctor to get diagnosed, for fear of the label, the consequences and ultimately, the outcome.

Although individuals with dementia should always be under medical care, most of the day-to-day-care falls to family members. It can be frustrating, exhausting and mystifying. But I'm here to tell you that **you are not alone**. Not only are there home care services such as FirstLight HomeCare of Boulder, but there are some great local support groups and educational materials that can help.

Many individuals with dementia in the early and intermediate stages can live alone. The diagnosis of dementia is heart breaking enough – convincing the elderly they need to give up their independence is even worse. That's one of the goals of FirstLight Homecare's Dementia Program – to build care around the individual and not the disease – thus allowing those with dementia to maintain their independence, dignity, integrity and peace of mind for as long as possible.

Our caregivers take a personalized, engaging approach to dementia care. We don't call them dementia patients – they are people -- each with their own needs, their own personalities and their own care plan. Our home care and personal care services focus on keeping your parent or loved one safe, and physically, mentally and socially active.

We can help you with minor modifications to the home, like grab bars in the shower and mats in the bathtubs. Studies have proven the importance of mental activity in slowing the progress of some types of dementia, so we engage in puzzles, games, reading, walks and talks. We talk a lot – about not just who we see today, but who they were.

We do not provide medical services such as occupational therapy or physical therapy. We are companions and caregivers, listeners and helpers.

At FirstLight HomeCare Boulder, we can provide care daily, weekly or monthly. We can come for two hours, or a whole day. We can spell you when you are on vacation or ready to lose your patience. Need 24/7 care? No problem.

Call at FirstLight HomeCare Boulder for personalized dementia care.