

Younger onset dementia

Younger onset dementia is a term used to describe any type of dementia in a person under the age of 65.

Younger onset dementia impacts the lives of individuals and families differently to those of older people. At the time of diagnosis, the person may still be working and supporting a family which can create unique challenges.

This can make younger onset dementia more difficult to diagnose.

Support from health professionals, family, friends and organisations such as Alzheimer's WA may make a positive impact on wellbeing.

Dealing with the stigma associated with dementia may be more complex for someone diagnosed with younger onset dementia. Negotiating everyday life can present challenges, as the dementia is not outwardly apparent and not expected in a younger person.

Children of a parent with younger onset dementia may find it particularly difficult to cope with the changes. They may still need the care and guidance of the parent or could be required to take on a carer role at a time when they would otherwise be becoming independent.

Progression of the disease differs for each person depending on their unique circumstances and type of dementia.

Symptoms

Symptoms vary depending on the area of the brain affected. This may include:

- » Short term memory loss
- » Challenges in planning or problem solving
- » Difficulty in completing tasks at home, work or in the community
- » Difficulties communicating with others.

Diagnosis

Obtaining a diagnosis for cognitive change in a younger person may be difficult, as other causes for symptoms will need to be ruled out.

Establishing a diagnosis may take some time and would ordinarily include the following steps:

- » Clinical consultation (initially with a general practitioner, then a referral to a specialist physician)
- » Medical history assessment

Types of dementia: Younger onset dementia

- » Physical and neurological examination
- » Assessment of cognitive function
- » CT and MRI scans
- » Blood tests
- » Neuropsychological testing.

Risk reduction

Ways you can modify your lifestyle to minimise risk:

- » Exercise
- » Nutrition: Wholefood diet (high in vegetables, quality sources of protein, low in sugar, minimal processed foods) and limit alcohol intake (two standard drinks or less on any given day)
- » Rest
- » Involvement: Stay socially connected
- » Challenge yourself: Try learning something new
- » Healthy heart
- » Quit smoking
- » Manage stress.

Treatment

Medications may be prescribed to help reduce the symptoms or slow the progression of some types of dementia.

It is important to obtain a formal diagnosis and speak to the relevant medical professionals (for instance your GP) about possible medical options for your type of dementia.

Living with younger onset dementia

Services and support are available and can assist with cognitive stimulation, and help a person to continue to live a meaningful life and do the things they enjoy. Other ways to live well include:

- » Regular exercise and a healthy diet
- » Fill your life with things you enjoy
- » Try new things
- » Stay socially engaged and connected to family, friends and community.

Further information

For support and information please contact us on **1300 66 77 88** or visit alzheimerswa.org.au