



# GER-E-NEWS

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## Early Diagnosis of Dementia

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### Introduction

Dementia is a disorder that is characterized by a decline in cognition involving one or more cognitive domains (e.g. learning and memory, language, executive function, complex attention, perceptual-motor, social cognition). The deficits must represent a decline from previous level of function and be severe enough to interfere with daily function and independence.

### Epidemiology

An estimated 6.2 million Americans age 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) which means one in nine people older than 65 years is affected by dementia.

### Why Early Diagnosis Matters

Dementia is one of the greatest health and social care challenges in developed countries. Early diagnosis has an impact on the patient as well as the family, who typically become caregivers.

### Clinical Presentation

The most common initial symptom is memory impairment. Other common early features are impaired executive functions, poor insight, sleep disturbance, repetition, behavioral and psychological symptoms such as anxiety, agitation. Most patients with dementia do not present with complaint of memory loss. It is often family members who will notice other early warning signs. If dementia is suspected by a clinician, obtaining collateral information by using a tool such as AD8 and inviting an informant to a future patient encounter in person or via Telemedicine can be of great help.

What's the difference?	
Signs of Alzheimer's/ dementia	Typical age-related changes
Poor judgment and decision making	Making a bad decision once in a while
Inability to manage a budget	Missing a monthly payment
Losing track of the date or the season	Forgetting which day it is and remembering later
Difficulty having a conversation	Sometimes forgetting which word to use
Misplacing things and being unable to retrace steps to find them	Losing things from time to time

[alz.org/10signs](http://alz.org/10signs)

## Assessment

Complete physical exam with detailed neurological exam is recommended. Evaluation for treatable causes of memory decline should be completed with laboratory testing and imaging studies. Some examples of treatable causes are hypothyroidism, depression, Normal Pressure Hydrocephalus. It is also important to exclude symptoms that are not related to alcohol and recreational substance use. In depth Cognitive screening such as Montreal Cognitive Assessment [MoCA] or Saint Louis University Mental Status [SLUMS] can be used to detect mild cognitive impairment and dementia.

## Early Diagnosis Benefits Both Patient And Family

**PATIENT**- Lessens anxieties regarding symptoms, allows patient participation in advance health care decision making, maximizes quality of life, spending time together with loved ones, allows for the accomplishment of things they always wanted, minimizes the potential to become target of scammers, food and financial security as family members will be more attentive. Use of Medications can have a modest improvement in some patients early on in the disease.

**FAMILY** - Gives an opportunity to advance the process of adaptation to the caregiver role, improves caregiver wellbeing by providing family with education about what to expect, delays institutionalization of the patient by providing multicomponent caregiver intervention through organizations such as Alzheimer's Association.

## 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

- 1 Memory loss that disrupts daily life
- 2 Challenging in planning or solving problems
- 3 Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships
- 4 Difficulty completing familiar tasks
- 5 Confusion with time or place
- 6 New problems with words in speaking or writing
- 7 Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps
- 8 Decreased or poor judgment
- 9 Withdrawal from work or social life
- 10 Changes in mood and Personality

## LIVING WELL WITH DEMENTIA

Challenge Yourself

Stay Connected

Healthy Habits

Nourish Your Soul

Find Your Purpose

Express Yourself

## References

AD8 <https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/ad8-dementia-screening.pdf>

[MoCA] Montreal Cognitive Assessment <https://www.mocatest.org/>

[SLUMS] Saint Louis University Mental Status [https://www.slu.edu/medicine/internal-medicine/geriatric-medicine/aging-successfully/pdfs/slums\\_form.pdf](https://www.slu.edu/medicine/internal-medicine/geriatric-medicine/aging-successfully/pdfs/slums_form.pdf)

[AZA] Alzheimer's Association <https://www.alz.org>