

# Dementia

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*A path to better care*



## Dementia

Dementia is not one specific disease but is rather a description for a collection of symptoms that are caused by disorders affecting the brain, including the most common form of dementia, Alzheimer's disease.

Dementia affects thinking, behaviour and the ability to perform everyday tasks. Brain function is affected enough to interfere with the person's normal social or working life.

The early signs of dementia may not be immediately obvious. Some common symptoms may include:

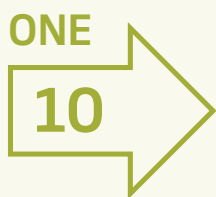
- Progressive and frequent memory loss
- Confusion
- Personality change
- Apathy and withdrawal
- Loss of ability to perform everyday tasks.

Dementia often impacts a person's ability to participate in the physical activities of daily living, which may include:

- Slower reaction time and poor co-ordination
- Weaker muscles, which can lead to falls
- Trouble doing more than one thing at a time – for example, carrying a cup of tea while walking

- Balance problems, including falls
- Challenges with finding your way around, moving around spaces and identifying objects, including furniture
- Changes in communication ability.

After a dementia diagnosis, you may have questions about how to live with this condition and what can be done to maintain brain function and quality of life.



Nearly one in ten people over 65 have dementia



Three in ten people over the age of 85 have dementia



40% of dementia cases can be attributed to risk factors, such as inactivity



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## How can physiotherapy help?

Physiotherapy can assist in the management of dementia through a variety of means. Early care by a physiotherapist after diagnosis of dementia can help optimise brain health, strength and balance through rehabilitation, exercise and physical activity.

A team-based approach to providing holistic care for people living with dementia, can greatly enhance quality of life and effectively manage pain. Physiotherapists can help train and educate families and carers of those living with dementia, to assist with enablement or re-ablement activities.

Physiotherapists can also consult and provide advice about gait aids, such as walking sticks or frames, or complicated movement issues including the use of machines such as wheelchairs or mechanical hoists.

After a dementia diagnosis, a physiotherapist can assess and manage non-verbal signs of pain, and provide clinical care and rehabilitation for other physical conditions people may experience, such as stroke or arthritis.

Research has shown that physiotherapy can help improve the quality of life and independence of older people, including those living with dementia, by:

- Improving motor skills, such as gait and balance
- Reducing frailty
- Reducing the number of falls and fractures
- Slowing cognitive decline.

## Additional resources

Dementia Australia can help you with:

- Information about dementia
- Support groups for people who have been diagnosed with dementia
- Private and confidential counselling
- Other programs and services in your local area.

You can also find more information and support at [\*Dementia Australia's website\*](#).

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## What next?

**GO TO**  
[choose.physio/find-a-physio](#)  
To find your gerontological physiotherapist.

**CHOOSE**  
'Gerontology' option under special interest area in the 'refine your search' drop-down box.

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[www.choose.physio/aged-care](http://www.choose.physio/aged-care)

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