

What is dementia?

Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities can develop dementia, which is a general term for the loss of memory and other intellectual abilities that are serious enough to interfere with daily life. Dementia is a progressive decline in cognitive function beyond what might be expected from normal aging.

How do I know if someone is experiencing symptoms of dementia?

It is important for caregivers, family members and other providers of services to be mindful of changes in behavior, both subtle and extreme. It may be helpful to develop a starting point or baseline of the activities of daily living, short term memory and personality traits of the person and note if changes occur. Tracking these activities at various points in a person’s life can help someone determine whether they should speak with their doctor about a diagnosis of dementia. Below are some of the things to look for:

Activities of Daily Living	Short-term Memory	Personality
Sleeping patterns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More or less on average Toileting schedule and output Eating habits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount of food eaten • Likes and dislikes Fluid intake Grooming and Dressing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty with buttons or zippers • Wearing the same clothing Need for assistance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they need more help preparing food, dressing, or mobility? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Losing items or placing them in unusual places (such as the freezer) • Asking someone to repeat information multiple times • Confusion about dates and times • Trouble identifying people they have met recently • Difficulty following a conversation or finding the right words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dramatic changes, such as shifting between outgoing and withdrawn • Unusual instances of fear or suspicion • Becoming easily upset • Depending more on other people to solve problems or make decisions • Decreased judgment, such as giving away money or neglecting personal grooming

How do I interact with someone who may be experiencing dementia?

- Try to remain flexible, patient and supportive.
- Allow adequate rest between stimulating events
- Create a calm environment free of background distractions and privacy when needed
- Use good eye contact and a calm voice when speaking
- Simplify tasks and choices presented
- Respond to the feeling behind what the person says instead of being confrontational or arguing about facts

What kinds of treatments or therapies are available for someone with dementia?

New medications have been very helpful to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who develop dementia. A correct diagnosis should be made as early as possible, so it is important to speak to a doctor if you detect symptoms of dementia. You can help by changing the person’s environment to create security and peace of mind. Be aware of discomfort someone may feel such as pain, hunger, thirst, constipation, full bladder, fatigue, being too cold or hot, infections and skin irritation. Recognize that the person is not just "acting mean or ornery," but is having further symptoms of dementia.

For further information or advocacy services, contact Arc Greater Twin Cities at 952-920-0855 or visit www.arcgreatertwincities.org.