

Dementia, the lost times



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The current techniques for diagnosis and treatment of dementia

Dementia is one of the most difficult challenges in modern neuroscience. It still can't be cured, and the vast majority of new drug trials have ended in failure. In fact, no new drugs have been approved for the treatment of dementia in well over a decade. Researchers conclude that while much more effective treatments may become available in the near future, the current best course of action in dealing with dementia is to identify and begin treating its symptoms as early as possible.

This is easier said than done however, given that dementia is [still not fully understood](#), and its range of risk factors vary from genetics to lifestyle choices and even past injuries. In this post, we go over the current cutting-edge techniques used to diagnose and treat dementia.

Testing & Complications in Diagnosing Dementia

The criteria for a dementia diagnosis is that two or more basic mental functions are sufficiently impaired so as to complicate a patient's daily life. Some of these are:

- Language & Communications Skills
- Orientation
- Ability to Focus
- Judgment
- Ability to Pay Attention
- Memory
- Problem Solving
- Ability to Reason

Even then, accurately determining the type of dementia can be challenging. For this reason, dementia has been [notoriously difficult](#) to diagnose
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and treat early. The current standard battery of tests to identify and diagnose dementia are:

- **Psychiatric Evaluation** This is obviously the most sensible first step. A qualified medical professional is usually able to ascertain within a few sessions whether or not a patient suffers from any psychiatric disorders that might contribute to or exacerbate symptoms of dementia. This can include depression, recent traumas or even [alcoholism](#).
- **Neurological & Cognitive Testing** Doctors begin with a series of tests, known formally as a cognitive screening, to gauge a patient's core mental functioning ability. Then a series of brain scans (most commonly CT, MRI and PET scans) are performed to assess brain activity patterns, as well as check for evidence of bleeding, a tumour or stroke.
- **Laboratory Testing** Finally, cerebrospinal fluid (commonly known as CSF or simply spinal fluid) is checked for evidence of inflammation, infection or indicators of other degenerative diseases. Blood samples can also be checked for signs of vitamin deficiencies or thyroid issues, both of which have adverse effects on healthy brain function.

Therapies & Medication in Managing Symptoms of Dementia

While dementia cannot be cured as of this writing, there are some popular forms of medication prescribed to improve symptoms of the disease. [Memantine](#) is a regulator of glutamate (i.e. glutamic acid), which is the most abundant neurotransmitter in the vertebrate nervous system. It is used as a communicator between nerve cells and other cells.

Rivastigmine, Galantamine and Donepezil are examples of [acetylcholinesterase inhibitors](#), which suppress the enzyme that breaks down the neurotransmitter acetylcholine. Increasing the levels and duration of this chemical messenger has been shown to [improve symptoms of Alzheimer's](#) and Parkinson's diseases, as well as vascular and Lewy body dementia.

Symptoms and exacerbating factors of dementia can also be improved without the use of drugs, as with the use of occupational therapy. A qualified professional cannot only keep relatives on top of the progression of patients' degenerative diseases; they can teach coping skills and accident prevention protocols as well.

At-Home Therapies & Waiting For a Cure

Finally, there are a number of lifestyle changes relatives and loved ones can make at home. Things like communications exercises, establishing routines and encouraging detail-oriented hobbies (such as gardening) are very good examples. Setting goals and planning for the future can greatly improve the quality of life for individuals with dementia – even as the world waits for on-going studies and clinical trials to finally turn up a viable method of treatment.

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