



PSYCHEDUP

with Dr. Diane McIntosh

Dementia



What is Dementia?

Dementia isn't one single disease, it's an umbrella term used to describe a group of brain disorders that affect thinking, memory, judgment, communication, and even physical coordination. Most people first notice memory concerns, but dementia affects so much more than recall. It impacts planning, problem-solving, decision-making, language, mood and behaviour. Over time, these changes disrupt day-to-day life and independence.

Recognizing Symptoms

While memory loss is the symptom most people associate with dementia, the condition affects many areas of daily life.

Symptoms may include:

- Memory loss, especially short-term memory
- Difficulty with understanding, judgement, and decision-making
- Trouble with planning, organization, or completing familiar tasks
- Changes in speech or difficulty understanding language
- Shifts in mood, personality, or emotional expression
- Confusion about time, place, or familiar people
- Challenges coping with daily living; managing bills, groceries, cooking
- Social withdrawal or trouble navigating social interactions
- Issues with physical coordination

Treating Dementia

Dementia is a diagnosis of exclusion. Before confirming it, clinicians rule out look-alike physical and psychiatric disorders, such as thyroid problems, other brain disorders, medication side effects, substance abuse or depression. A careful medication review is essential.

Managing Treatable Symptoms

While we cannot stop disease progression, many behavioural and psychiatric symptoms can be treated, including:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Agitation
- Sleep problems
- Psychosis

Supporting Caregivers of People with Dementia

Caring for someone with dementia is emotionally and physically exhausting - the rates of caregiver burnout are sky-high. Support for caregivers is essential, not only for their own well-being but also to ensure the person with dementia receives compassionate, sustainable care.

Creating a safe space for emotions

At times, caregivers may feel love, frustration, anger, and grief - sometimes all at once. Talking to professionals or peer support groups can help process these feelings and understand them for what they are - perhaps a form of anticipatory grief or even a reflection of exhaustion or frustration.

Prioritizing self-care

Caregivers may feel obligated to be available 24/7, risking exhaustion, stress, strained relationships, and ultimately, burnout. Taking regular breaks, maintaining social connections, and seeking support prevents burnout and helps sustain energy and patience, enabling them to provide better care.

Support

Support may take many forms- friends, family, a support group or healthcare professional. One incredible support service is the **Alzheimer's Society**, which offers free confidential information and support for anyone affected by dementia, whether personally or professionally, to get the support they need, when it's needed.

Managing stress and emotional burden

Chronic stress can lead to anxiety, depression, or burnout. It's important for caregivers to give themselves permission to take care of themselves as a means of protecting their ability to care for others. Seeking help and support through counseling, peer support, or other means is a sign of strength, not weakness.



Support Organizations

[Alzheimer Society of Canada](#)

[Alzheimer Society of Canada - Support for caregivers](#)

[Government of Canada](#)

[Alzheimer's Association](#)

[Canadian Institute for Health Information](#)

[Hope for Dementia](#)

[The Center for Addiction and Mental Health](#)

[The Center for Addiction and Mental Health - Dementia in older adults](#)

[Canadian Mental Health Association](#)

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