



DEMENTIA?

HOW DOES THAT WORK IN
OUR BRAIN?

This brochure was developed by the working group 'Gekleurde Wijsheid' (Colored Wisdom), in collaboration with the brOes Dementia Expertise Center. Gekleurde Wijsheid is a collaboration of: Sankaa, Knowledge Center WWZ, Brussels Ouderenplatform, De Overmolen, LDC Forum, Vief, Cultuurvuur, VUB, International Committee, BrOes, Elder, Union of Active Associations

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As you age, your body slowly declines. Your muscle strength decreases, your bones become more brittle, and you have more ailments. Your brain capacity will decline. You might notice that you forget something once in a while, need more time to process information, or perhaps have more difficulty recalling a name. This is annoying, but it is part of aging and does not need to be a big problem. Sometimes, however, the brain declines a bit more. Forgetfulness can become a real problem, speaking becomes more difficult, you may notice a change in your personality, or for example cooking may become harder. Then there might be more going on, and you might start thinking about a case of dementia.

Dementia is a disease of the brain and mainly affects people over 60 years old (in exceptional cases, younger people can also be affected). The older you get, the greater the risk of developing dementia. This disease will impact your brain, leading to the deterioration of many basic functions and interfere with performing daily activities. The exact symptoms depend on the nature of the disease, which parts of the brain are affected, and how severe the disease is.

There are different forms of dementia, with Alzheimer's disease being the most common one. In Alzheimer's disease, the first complaints are often problems with memory and retaining new information. For example, people with Alzheimer's disease can usually recall memories from their childhood well, but they will completely forget that they had visitors yesterday.

The severity of dementia will continue to increase until the person with dementia dies. Eventually, the person with dementia will become completely dependent on others. Unfortunately, there is currently no cure for dementia.

I think something might be off, what are the typical symptoms I could watch out for?

- Memory problems: asking the same questions or telling the same stories, forgetting recent events
- Confusion about time: not knowing which day, month, year, or season it is. For example, someone might wear light clothing on a cold winter day or want to go to work while they are retired.
- Getting lost in a familiar environment: not finding the way home after shopping, even though the route is very familiar.
- Language problems: difficulty finding words, difficulty understanding language, relying more and more on the mother tongue, and finding it harder to speak a language learned later in life.
- Difficulties with planning and organizing: keeping appointments, cooking meals, planning trips, cleaning, dressing.
- Changes in mood, behavior, and personality. Realizing that something is wrong or no longer being able to perform tasks you always could do, can lead to anxiety, uncertainty, or depressive feelings. Additionally, personality can change due to dementia in a specific part of the brain.

“ Especially because I am of Muslim origin, dementia is still a taboo. As an ambassador, I want to help break the taboo around dementia among people with a migration background. There is still a lot of ignorance. They don't know where or who to turn to. And also learn that accepting help is not a bad thing.”



Fatima, daughter, caregiver and ambassador for the 'Onthou mens, vergeet dementie' campaign ('Remember the human, forget the dementia').
www.onthoumens.be

You are worried, what to do now?

It can be very frightening to notice that you can no longer count on a proper brain function. Don't keep these worries to yourself. Here are some tips to get started:

1. Talk about it with someone you trust. This could be a family member, a friend, a neighbor, another trusted person such as someone from your religion, etc. This is not an easy step, but making it discussable is very important. It can help to share your worries and talk about it.
2. Go to your general practitioner. Preferably with someone you trust and who can support you in this conversation. Prepare the visit well. Note what you want to say, the problems you notice, and all your questions. If needed, your general practitioner can refer you to the right professional. You don't have a regular GP? Your pharmacist or another professional caregiver can also be a first point of contact.

The symptoms described here can also be caused by something different than dementia. These causes can often be solved, such as a vitamin deficiency or an infection. Therefore, it is important to get examined if you notice a problem.

In Belgium, there are currently more than 200,000 people with dementia. Various organizations are ready to help these people and their families. For example, you can contact your mutuality to answer questions about dementia and for information about organizations that can support you at home. Nurses can help at home with medical care, and an organization like Familiehulp can support you with household tasks.

For all your questions about dementia, support in finding the right organization for your needs, or to discuss your concerns, you can contact the brOes Dementia Expertise Center.

www.dementie.be/broes

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