

# Dementia illnesses

INFORMATION SHEET FROM THE SWEDISH DEMENTIA CENTRE

Demenssjukdomar • faktablad på engelska

## What is dementia?

Dementia is the generic term for a range of symptoms which are the result of an illness or injury to the brain. Dementia illnesses make it harder to think, plan and communicate. The symptoms usually develop gradually and should be observed for at least six months in order for a diagnosis to be made.

## Does not constitute natural ageing

For a long time dementia has been regarded as an inevitable consequence of old-age. We now know that approximately 100 various medical conditions can lead to dementia. Dementia does not constitute natural ageing, however it is much more common during old-age. Of the approximately 150 000 people who have a dementia illness in Sweden, the vast majority are older than 75.

## Examples of dementia illnesses

Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia, and accounts for 60–70% of all cases of dementia. The second most common is vascular dementia, also known as blood vessel dementia. It usually occurs together with Alzheimer's disease, which is referred to as mixed dementia.

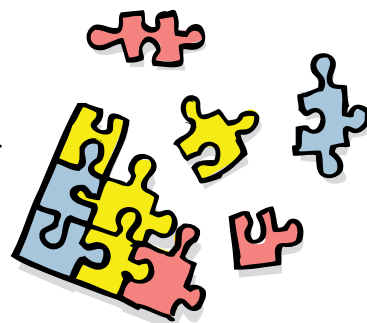
Other forms of dementia include frontal lobe dementia, Lewy Body Dementia and Parkinson's disease with dementia. Alcohol abuse, brain tumour and HIV can also lead to dementia.

## It usually starts with forgetfulness

Early symptoms usually include forgetfulness and it becomes increasingly difficult to orientate oneself in unfamiliar surroundings. Things which used to be simple become more difficult to plan and execute. Language is affected as it becomes more difficult to express oneself. Irritation, depression and changes in personality are also associated with the disease. The symptoms vary depending on the type of illness and injury.

## From mild to severe dementia

The course of dementia often extends over several years. The illness develops gradually, new symptoms appear and abilities are lost. Gradually the individual with the illness requires additional assistance and support in order to cope with everyday life. The course of the disease is usually divided in three phases: mild, moderate and severe dementia.



## Early diagnosis is important

Do not hesitate to contact a doctor if dementia is suspected. It is essential to start an examination as soon as possible in order to receive the correct diagnosis, assistance and treatment. The examination usually takes several weeks and covers a variety of tests and investigations.

There are several medical conditions which can give rise to symptoms similar to those of dementia and these are curable. If a dementia illness is diagnosed, medication can sometimes ease the symptoms. Means of assistance and several other initiatives can facilitate everyday life.

## Plan for the future

It is also important that the symptoms are explained thoroughly both for the one with the illness and for family and friends. Detailed knowledge of the illness makes it easier to plan a good and meaningful life. Sharing experiences with others in similar situations is often perceived as valuable.

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Additional information sheets in different languages are available on the Swedish Dementia Centre's website:  
[www.demenscentrum.se/Faktablad](http://www.demenscentrum.se/Faktablad)

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Svenskt Demenscentrum

The Swedish Dementia Centre, Gävlegatan 16, 113 30 Stockholm, 08 - 690 58 00, [info@demenscentrum.se](mailto:info@demenscentrum.se)

[www.demenscentrum.se](http://www.demenscentrum.se)