

Frontotemporal Dementia

INFORMATION SHEET FROM THE SWEDISH DEMENTIA CENTRE

Frontotemporal demens • faktablad på engelska

Affects the anterior parts of the brain

Frontotemporal dementia is also known as frontal lobe dementia, and causes nerve cells atrophy in the anterior parts of the brain; in the frontal lobe or in front of the temporal lobes behind the temples. As with Alzheimer's disease, symptoms usually appear gradually, however, there are clear differences between the two forms of dementia.

Non-typical symptoms of dementia

While forgetfulness and difficulty learning new things, are early signs of Alzheimer's disease, these symptoms are not typical for frontotemporal dementia. If such symptoms appear, they do so in later stages of the disease. Frontotemporal dementia is characterised, instead, either by changes in behaviour or language difficulties, depending on where in the brain the disease starts.

Personality change

In frontotemporal dementia, the frontal lobe, which is responsible for concentration, judgment and impulse control, is often affected first. The personality of the affected person changes slowly with increasingly poor judgment.

Other early signs are increased difficulty in taking initiative and inexplicable outbursts of anger. It is quite normal for the person to be restless, emotionally jaded and sometimes apathetic. The ability to feel empathy deteriorates gradually and also overconsumption of food, smoking or alcohol may be present.

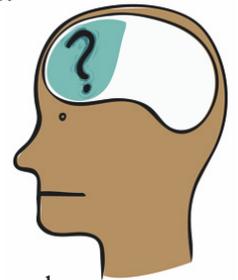
Language difficulties in some cases

Frontotemporal dementia can start in front of the temporal lobes which affect language and is referred to as progressive aphasia. This manifests itself as reduced comprehension of words and difficulties in naming the right word for different objects such as car or key. It can also manifest itself in a sluggish and jagged speech with many grammatical errors.

Need for more assistance

It is not uncommon for frontotemporal dementia to appear as early as in late middle age, while lasting many more years. More and more symptoms appear over time and they gradually increase in strength as the brain damage spreads.

Coping with everyday life becomes increasingly difficult and eventually the person will need help with getting dressed, their hygiene and other personal care.



Early diagnosis is important

Frontotemporal dementia symptoms can be confused with depression, fatigue syndrome (burn-out) or other mental illnesses. The disease can be difficult to detect as forgetfulness and other dementia typical symptoms are unusual in the beginning.

Contact your physician if you suspect that you or someone close to you may be affected by frontotemporal dementia. An assessment should be done as soon as possible. Normally this would be done at a specialist clinic (memory clinic) and include various tests and examinations, as well as interviews with family members.

Treatment

While there has been progress in research, ways in which to curb the progression of frontotemporal dementia, have not yet been found. However, it is still important to understand the symptoms, in order to plan for a life as fulfilling and meaningful as possible. Assistive devices and good care, can in many ways make life easier. As stress often amplifies the symptoms, it is also important to create a peaceful and quiet environment for the affected person.

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



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