

## **My Family Caregiver.com, Article 1 on Dementia, August 8, 2013**

### **Symptoms of Dementia**

By Melissa Pilgrim

Medically speaking, dementia is not a specific disease but rather a term that describes symptoms that result in memory loss and a decline in one's ability to perform the basic activities of daily life.

Caring for a friend or loved one suffering from dementia can be one of the most grueling experiences you can go through. Seeing your loved one deteriorate mentally, emotionally, and physically right before your eyes is a heart wrenching reality that many of us will experience. There is no easy way to discuss the symptoms of dementia or the turmoil this illness will have on not only its patient, but also on you as a caregiver.

To help empower you to face dementia and the effects it may have on your loved one to the best of your ability, it is important to educate yourself on its symptoms and the medical attention needed after a professional diagnosis has been given.

### **Symptoms of Dementia Can Include:**

#### **Significant Changes in Memory/Disorientation**

Patients with dementia often suffer from short term memory loss, but often have sudden memories of events that took place much earlier in their life. For example, your loved one may not remember what they ate for breakfast that day or where they placed their car keys, but they will remember the date of their high school prom or are able to easily recall an obscure event from their childhood with great detail. With these changes in one's mental state, you may also notice mild to severe disorientation. For example, your loved one may suddenly forget the location of a nearby grocery store that they have frequented for years or forget their home address or telephone number.

#### **Mild to Drastic Changes in Behavior**

This is often one of the most difficult symptoms of dementia for you as a caregiver to experience, for many who suffer from dementia will become easily agitated, frustrated, paranoid, or even inappropriate in their behavior or speech at times. Your loved one who was once a happy, easy-going person may suddenly develop traits of the opposite—becoming easily angered, depressed, or withdrawn.

#### **Hallucinations**

This is often witnessed towards the end stages of dementia when many patients begin to experience visual, mental, and/or auditory hallucinations. For example, your loved one may say they see or have spoken to a dear friend or relative who you know has already passed away many years ago. Sometimes it is recalled from a dream, but sometimes they say it happened during the day while they were wide awake.

**Decline in Cognitive Behaviors**

Those suffering from dementia may also experience a significant decline in their cognitive abilities including speech, reading, writing, and/or their ability to express thoughts and feelings. For example, your loved one may suddenly have difficulty reading their favorite magazine or book, which once used to be a favorite pastime.

As with any health concern you may have regarding your loved one's mental, physical, or emotional well-being, if you feel your loved one is experiencing any of these symptoms or behaviors, please consult a doctor for a professional diagnosis and further medical attention.

**(Sources:** Alzheimer's Association, Mayo Clinic)