

Question:

Is Alzheimer's disease different from dementia or are they the same? Is dementia a separate disease? It is so confusing as well as a serious concern to me as I age.

Before your questions are answered, you need to know that Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of aging. While it is important to look for signs that might indicate Alzheimer's disease versus basic forgetfulness and other conditions, it is always important to reach out to a healthcare professional for a comprehensive evaluation.

According to several fact sheets from the Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA), dementia is often thought of as a disease but in fact is **not** a disease. Rather, dementia is a general term that describes a group of symptoms related to the loss of functions such as the loss of memory, judgment, language and complex motor skills. These can interfere with activities of daily living such as eating, mobility and toileting.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia in persons aged 65 and older and probably the most familiar today when the subject of memory arises. It is a progressive brain disorder that slowly destroys memory, thinking and language skills and the ability to carry out the simplest tasks. Other causes of dementia include vascular dementia, caused by stroke or blockage of blood supply and dementia with Lewy bodies; alcohol dementia; trauma dementia, caused by head injury and a rare form of dementia, frontotemporal dementia.

Signs that may appear with dementia include: trouble with new memories, especially of recent events, names, places and inability to learn new things; misplacing familiar objects; difficulty finding words; confusion about time, places or people; personality changes; seeing or hearing things; struggling to complete familiar actions, such as brushing one's teeth; trouble finding appropriate words, for example in a sentence and difficulty in judging.

The Alzheimer's Foundation of America follows the National Institutes of Health National Institute on Aging in describing Alzheimer's disease in three stages: mild (early), moderate (middle); and severe (late). The progression, in terms of time and behavior, will vary from person to person. It is wise to consult with a neurologist regarding diagnosis, progression, care and medications.

Check out the following websites: Alzheimer's Association-www.alz.org; Alzheimer's Foundation of America-www.alzfdn.org; National Family Caregiver's Association-www.thefamilycaregiver.org; www.Staying Connected SCHH.org for local resources.