

ASSESSING CONFUSION –DEMENTIA

Dementia is a syndrome (a group of related symptoms) that is associated with an ongoing decline of the brain and its abilities. These include:

- memory
 - thinking
 - language
 - understanding
 - judgement
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- Dementia is progressive, which means the symptoms will gradually get worse. How fast dementia progresses will depend on the individual person and what type of dementia they have. Each person is unique and will experience dementia in their own way. It is often the case that the person's family and friends are more concerned about the symptoms than the person may be themselves.

Symptoms of dementia

- Loss of memory – this particularly affects short-term memory, for example forgetting what happened earlier in the day, not being able to recall conversations, being repetitive or forgetting the way home from the shops. Long-term memory is usually still quite good.
- Mood changes – people with dementia may be withdrawn, sad, frightened or angry about what is happening to them.
- Communication problems – including problems finding the right words for things, for example describing the function of an item instead of naming it.

In the later stages of dementia, the person affected will have problems carrying out everyday tasks and will become increasingly dependent on other people.

People with dementia may also become apathetic, have problems controlling their emotions or behaving appropriately in social situations. Aspects of their personality may change or they may see or hear things that other people do not, or have false beliefs. Most cases of dementia are caused by damage to the structure of the brain.

Types of dementia

- Alzhiemers disease where small clumps of protein, known as plaques, begin to develop around brain cells. This disrupts the normal workings of the brain.

Problems of short-term memory are usually the first noticeable sign.

- Vascular dementia, where problems with blood circulation result in parts of the brain not receiving enough blood and oxygen.
- Dementia with Lewy bodies, where abnormal structures, known as Lewy bodies, develop inside the brain.
- Fronto-temporal dementia, where the frontal and temporal lobes (two parts of the brain) begin to shrink. Unlike other types of dementia, fronto-temporal dementia usually develops in people who are under 65. It is much rarer than other types of dementia.

Although there are other types of dementia these tend to be rare.