



adasa

Association for Dementia and Alzheimer's of South Africa

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# What is Alzheimer's Disease?

[www.adasa.org.za](http://www.adasa.org.za)

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Alzheimer's (say: ALTS-hy-merz) is a brain disease that causes problems with memory, thinking, and behaviour. Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia. It causes memory loss and the loss of other cognitive abilities severe enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60-80% (First-world countries) of persons living with dementia.

Alzheimer's is not a normal part of ageing. The most significant known risk factor is increasing age; most people with Alzheimer's are 65 and older. When Alzheimer's affects a person under 65, it is referred to as younger-onset or early-onset Alzheimer's.

## Signs and Symptoms

Alzheimer's changes typically begin in the part of the brain that affects learning. Alzheimer's is a progressive disease that gradually worsens over a number of years. The most common early symptom of Alzheimer's is difficulty remembering newly learned information. The first sign of Alzheimer's disease is an ongoing pattern of forgetting things (dates, appointments, events, words, names, etc.) that affect a person's daily life.

# Progress of the disease

How fast Alzheimer's gets worse, is different from person to person. In the early stages, the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease can be tough to see. However, it often begins with memory lapses and difficulty finding the right words for everyday objects. As Alzheimer's advances through the brain, it leads to increasingly severe symptoms, including disorientation, mood, and behaviour changes; deepening confusion about events, time, and place; unfounded suspicions about family, friends, and professional caregivers; more severe memory loss and behaviour changes; and difficulty speaking, swallowing and walking. The disease does eventually lead to complete dependence and, finally, death.

## Treatment

At present, there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease. However, some drugs appear to help people with Alzheimer's disease think more clearly for longer. Drugs may also be prescribed to ease other symptoms, such as restlessness or depression, or to help a person with Alzheimer's disease sleep better. Non-drug therapies, such as music therapy or exercise, can also help people with Alzheimer's and improve their quality of life.

## Support

Support is available for persons with Alzheimer's, their families, and caregivers. This support can make a positive difference in caring for the person with Alzheimer's and support the families and caregivers with information, education, and counselling. - visit [www.adasa.org.za](http://www.adasa.org.za) for more information.

