Dementia, Alzheimer's, and Cognitive Impairment

Dementia is an umbrella term that describes multiple diseases and conditions that affect the brain and brain functioning. It is estimated that more than 55 million people worldwide live with dementia. While it affects older people predominantly, it is not an inevitable part of aging. Unfortunately, there are no proven and significant treatments (or supplements) widely available that have yet been shown effective in fighting the disease.

Signs of Dementia

There are multiple indications of dementia. While some are ordinary, you should immediately schedule an appointment with your physician if you notice an increase or new behaviors in any of the signs below.

- Memory loss affecting daily activities, or abilities, or recognizing common objects
- Hallucinations and acting out dreams
- Problems with language comprehension or speaking
- Impaired motor skills, trouble sleeping, and impaired thinking
- Personality changes and disorientation with locations and time

Most Common Screening Tests for Dementia

There are a variety of screening tools that may be used by healthcare professionals and communities to screen for dementia. Check with your physician about what they recommend. The most common are:

- **Saint Louis University Mental Status Exam (SLUMS)** - this is a common 11-item Alzheimer's screening test helps a healthcare provider evaluate: Orientation, Short-term memory, Calculations, Naming of animals, Clock drawing test, and Recognition of geometric figures. Final scores range from 0 to 30. 27 to 30: Normal in a person with a high school education - 21 to 26: Suggest a mild neurocognitive disorder - 0 to 20: Indicate dementia.
- **Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA)** – a brief test which includes clock-drawing and a test of executive functions.
- **Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE**) – comprised of 11 questions examining 5 areas of cognitive function. 30 points possible. Score of 25 or greater is considered normal.

The Stages of Dementia

- **Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)** - Cognitive struggle, but still able to be productive and independent. 50% will progress to dementia, 50% remain with MCI or improve.
- **Early | Mild Dementia** - Many people with early stages of Dementia can live independently and are able to drive, work, and do normal activities of life. They may have memory lapses, forget words and what they just read, lose and misplace things, and have trouble making decisions.
- **Middle | Moderate Dementia** - This stage is usually the longest and can last many years and, they will need increased care. They may mix up words, get frustrated and angry, get confused, wander away and get lost, become paranoid and exhibit compulsive behaviors.
- **Late-Stage Dementia** - They will progressively lose the ability to take care of themselves, express thoughts and communicate, and will exhibit significant personality changes. They probably will need 24/7 care, have problems communicating, be forgetful, and lose physical abilities.

You're Not Alone

There are many support groups and informational sources that can help you navigate dementia. While there will be good days and challenging days, learning about dementia, joining support groups, and spending time with your loved one will make the days easier and more enjoyable.

A good and broadly used option for care is a Memory Care Community. It can offer a secure, safe, and supportive environment with higher-than-average staff/resident ratios, and special training to respond and cater to the needs of your loved one suffering from memory loss. Day programs may also be available.

Alzheimer's Association & Support Groups in Your Area
https://www.alz.org | https://www.alz.org/help-support/community/support-groups

Helpful YouTube Channels
Dementia Care Blazers | https://www.youtube.com/@DementiaCareblazers
Teepa Snow | https://www.youtube.com/@teepasnowvideos

"At the Window with Dementia" Podcast by Laura Banner (available on all podcast platforms)
https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/at-the-window-with-dementia/id1516207874