

WHAT IS DEMENTIA | MATE WAREWARE?

What is Dementia?

- Dementia is the umbrella term for a number of diseases and causes of problems with thinking and memory that are severe enough to make managing day to day life more difficult to achieve. Signs and Symptoms can vary considerably but may include memory loss, poor concentration, difficulties with planning and organising, difficulty judging distances, coordination problems, disorientation and changes in mood and behaviour.
- Dementia has physical, social, and economic impacts. Not only for the people living with dementia – but also for their families and society at large. Here is often a lack of awareness and understanding of dementia resulting in stigmatisation and barriers to diagnosis and Care. (World Health Organisation)

Causes of Dementia

There are many different causes of dementia, the following are the most common.

Alzheimer's Disease

- Alzheimer's Disease is a progressive brain condition that causes the brain to shrink and the brain cells to eventually die. It was first noted in 1907 by German doctor, Alois Alzheimer. It is characterised by changes to brain structure called plaques and tangles, which are considered “prime suspects” in damaging and killing of brain cells.
- Plaques are Beta Amyloid proteins that build up in the spaces **between** the nerve cells, hindering the transmission of messages between the cells.
- Tangles are fibres of Tau, a protein that builds up **inside** the cells. They damage the connections between the cells and eventually causes the brain to die. This causes the brain to shrink.
- Changes to the brain may occur many years prior, but at a certain point the brain is unable to compensate for the changes making it unable to function properly, affecting their day-to-day living.

Vascular Dementia

- Vascular dementia occurs when there is impaired blood flow to the brain that causes damage.
- Factors that may increase the risk of vascular dementia include health issues such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure, infection, high cholesterol, and smoking. It is important, therefore, to work to minimise or manage these factors as they may help to lessen the chances of developing vascular dementia.
- The thinking problems caused by vascular dementia may vary considerably, depending on the severity and location of the blood vessel damage.
- The symptoms of vascular dementia are often more obvious following a stroke or a series of mini strokes, causing a step like downward progression of symptoms following an event.

Dementia with Lewy Bodies

- People with Lewy Body dementia are likely to experience symptoms similar to Parkinsons Disease such as rigid muscles, slow movement, trouble walking, and tremors.
- When the brain cells are examined under a microscope, they contain structures containing protein called Lewy Bodies. These structures affect the regions of the brain that are specifically responsible for thinking and movement.
- People who have Lewy Bodies in their brains also have plaques and tangles associated with Alzheimer's Disease, so they also experience cognitive decline.
- Lewy Body can only be fully diagnosed at a postmortem. A diagnosis may be made based on the symptoms the person with dementia presents with.

Fronto-Temporal Dementia

- Fronto-Temporal Dementia, (FTD), is caused by damage to the neurons in the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain. It is, therefore, associated with problems with movement, behaviour, personality, and language.
- Fronto-Temporal Dementia is a rarer form of dementia, but it is still common enough to be quite well known. It is more common for people who are younger in age than other forms of dementia. Approximately 60% of people with Fronto-Temporal Dementia are under the age of 65.
- It is a progressive disease with symptoms getting worse and increasing over time as other parts of the brain become affected.

Who gets Dementia | Mate Wareware?

- While there are known risk factors and protective factors associated with developing dementia there are no guarantees as to who will or won't develop dementia | mate wareware.
- Dementia becomes more common as people grow older. It is estimated that approximately 70 000 New Zealanders have dementia | mate wareware.
- About 1 in 100 people in their 60s are estimated to be affected and 1 in 3 people over the age of 90.
- The number of people living with dementia | mate wareware is expected to rise sharply in the next few decades as our growing ageing population lives longer.
- Increased knowledge about dementia | mate wareware also means some people are being diagnosed earlier in the disease process.
- It is estimated that over 5000 New Zealanders under the age of 65 years have dementia. (Younger Onset Dementia Aotearoa Trust)

What is the treatment for Dementia | Mate Wareware?

- There is no cure for Dementia | Mate Wareware but there are medications available that may help some people, for some time, to function better than they otherwise would. One of these, Donepezil is subsidised by Pharmac.
- Talking therapies like counselling can also help people to come to terms with the changes that a diagnosis of dementia | mate wareware brings and the feelings that can arise.
- Much of the treatment of dementia | mate wareware is social rather than medical. If you have dementia or are supporting someone with dementia it is important to maintain interests, social contacts, self-esteem and purpose in life. When people with dementia | mate wareware are encouraged to remain as independent as possible in their activities of daily living, their quality of life is better.
- Exercise and a healthy diet are also important factors in living well with dementia | mate wareware. Most people with dementia | mate wareware live in the community. With good support, people with dementia can continue to live full and meaningful lives.

Early warning signs of Dementia | Mate Wareware

- The brain changes that are thought to cause dementia may have been slowly building up for many years, even decades, before a person begins to show clinical symptoms.
- Early signs can be vague and not immediately obvious, difficulty with daily activities can become more apparent, such as:
 - Forgetting things or recent events
 - Paying bills
 - Regularly losing personal items like a wallet or car keys
 - Planning and preparing meals
 - Remembering appointments
 - Getting lost when walking or driving
 - Confusion
 - Performing familiar tasks
 - Following conversations or finding words
 - Co-ordination problems
 - Misjudging distances.

- Given that there can be some age-related changes in memory this can cause people to become concerned they have dementia. Occasionally forgetting a friend's name or losing your keys does not mean you have dementia. However, anyone who is worried about noticeable changes in their memory or other related symptoms are advised to discuss their concerns with a G.P. This ensures other causes for these changes can be treated where appropriate.
- Brain functioning can be affected by many things including stress, grief, depression and physical illnesses. If the symptoms are a result of dementia | make wareware, then an early diagnosis can provide access to medications, support and information.

Useful Websites

- [Younger Onset Dementia — Younger Onset Dementia Aotearoa Trust](#)
- [What is dementia? - Alzheimers New Zealand](#)
- [Dementia - Symptoms and causes - Mayo Clinic](#)
- [Dementia](#)
- [About dementia | Dementia Australia](#)

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