



Understanding dementia



What is dementia?

In Southern African communities (including Botswana) there is not a single word that describes dementia. Dementia is a set of symptoms that may include problems remembering, speaking and understanding. Dementia is a medical condition and not a natural part of ageing.

Dementia is nothing to be ashamed of. There is often a misunderstanding that dementia is a punishment for something that has happened in a past life or as a result of black magic. These beliefs often mean a delay in diagnosis but it is really important to get an early diagnosis so you and help with managing this condition.



Signs and symptoms of dementia

There are several types of dementia and they all affect people differently. Here are some of the common signs and symptoms, with real-life examples shared from the local South Asian communities:

Difficulty in recalling things or events that have recently happened

"My grandfather keeps asking who my name is despite telling several times a day"

"When I eat my lunch I will forget a short while later what I have eaten"

Difficulty remembering how to do everyday tasks

"I knew something wasn't right as my dad wasn't able to remember how to use the television remote control"

Difficulty with talking, reading and writing

"A woman who attended our support group kept repeating the same sentences over and over again. Other people did not want to sit with her as they felt there was something wrong but didn't know what it was"

Appearing confused/disorientated

"My grandfather isn't able to go to the store alone anymore as he can't remember his way there"

Changes in a person's personality and mood

"My uncle was always a jolly man but now he argues over really silly things, and he wasn't like that before"

Although these symptoms could be dementia, they could also be one of the things listed below. These can all be easily treated or managed if diagnosed early:

- anaemia
- heart disease
- dehydration
- diabetes
- an untreated infection
- depression
- thyroid Problems
- stress

Diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels are all factors which can increase the risk of dementia. These conditions are common in our communities.

First steps

Anyone worried about these symptoms should make an appointment with a Doctor or Local Clinic.



Diagnosing dementia – why get a diagnosis?

- to rule out fear and anxiety that may be caused by self-diagnosis
- a diagnosis helps the Doctor to rule out illnesses that may have similar symptoms to dementia
- having a diagnosis may mean it is possible to be prescribed medication and help the patient and their family to plan for the future
- have access to appropriate health and support.

Making a diagnosis

- **Background Information** - The Doctor will spend time talking to the patient trying to establish symptoms
- **Physical examinations** – The Doctor will normally perform a number of tests
- **Memory tests** – The Doctor will test thinking and memory
- **Ability to cope** – The Doctor can refer to other services that can provide support
- **Communication** – The Doctor should communicate their findings and actions to be taken
- **Referral to a specialist** - The Doctor is the usual person to refer someone to see a specialist. A consultant will have more specialised knowledge and experience of dementia.

Can dementia be prevented?

We don't yet understand dementia well enough to know if it can be prevented and researchers are still investigating how the disease develops. However, there's good evidence that a healthy lifestyle can help reduce the risk.

Memory assessment

If a Doctor is concerned about the possibility of dementia they may recommend a memory test. If needed they may make a referral to the memory assessment service. Interpreters can be requested for any Doctor or hospital appointment.



The risk of dementia can be reduced by:



Having a healthy lifestyle and avoiding fatty foods



Not smoking



Keeping physically active



Keeping mentally and socially active



Managing diabetes

This leaflet is also available in alternative formats.

Please email: **dementia@pelonomi.com**
for more information.

For further information go to **www.pelonomi.com**

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