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# Memory Loss: Causes, Preventative Measures and Treatments

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# Memory Loss: Causes, Preventative Measures and Treatments

## Memory Basics

Memory is a property of the human mind: the ability to retain information. Memory is much studied by cognitive psychology and neuroscience. There are multiple types of classifications for memory based on duration, nature and retrieval of perceived items.

The main stages in the formation and retrieval of memory, from an information processing perspective, are:

- Encoding (processing and combining of received information)
- Storage (creation of a permanent record of the encoded information)
- Retrieval/Recall (calling back the stored information in response to some cue for use in some process or activity)

## **Classification by Duration**

A basic and generally accepted classification of memory is based on the duration of memory retention, and identifies three distinct types of memory: sensory memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory.

The sensory memory corresponds approximately to the initial moment that an item is perceived. Some of this information in the sensory area proceeds to the sensory store, which is referred to as short-term memory. Sensory memory is characterized by the duration of memory retention from milliseconds to seconds and short-term memory from seconds to minutes. These stores are generally characterized as of strictly limited capacity and duration, whereas in general stored information can be retrieved in a period of time, which ranges from days to years; this type of memory is called long-term memory.

It may be that short-term memory is supported by transient changes in neuronal communication, whereas long-term memories are maintained by more stable and permanent changes in neural structure that are dependent on protein synthesis. Some psychologists, however, argue that the distinction between long- and short-term memories is arbitrary, and is merely a reflection of differing levels of activation within a single store.

If we are given a random seven-digit number, we may remember it only for a few seconds and then forget (short-term memory). On the other hand, we can remember telephone numbers for many years (assuming we use them often enough). Those long-lasting memories are said to be stored in long-term memory.

Additionally, the term working memory is used to refer to the short-term store needed for certain mental tasks - it is not a synonym for short-term memory, since it is defined not in terms of duration, but rather in terms of purpose. Some theories consider working memory to

be the combination of short-term memory and some attentional control. For instance, when we are asked to mentally multiply 45 by 4, we have to perform a series of simple calculations (additions and multiplications) to arrive at the final answer. The ability to store the information regarding the instructions and intermediate results is what is referred to as working memory.

### **Classification of Memory by Information Type**

Long-term memory, the largest part of any model, can be divided into declarative (explicit) and procedural (implicit) memories.

Declarative memory requires conscious recall, in that some conscious process must call back the information. It is sometimes called explicit memory, since it consists of information that is explicitly stored and retrieved.

Declarative memory can be further sub-divided into semantic memory, which concerns facts taken independent of context; and episodic memory, which concerns information specific to a particular context, such as a time and place. Semantic memory allows the encoding of abstract knowledge about the world, such as "Paris is the capital of France". Episodic memory, on the other hand, is used for more personal memories, such as the sensations, emotions, and personal associations of a particular place or time.

Autobiographical memory - memory for particular events within one's own life - is generally viewed as either equivalent to, or a subset of, episodic memory. Visual memory is part of memory preserving some characteristics of our senses pertaining to visual experience. We are able to place in memory information that resembles objects, places, animals or people in sort of a mental image.

In contrast, procedural memory (or implicit memory) is not based on the conscious recall of information, but on an implicit learning. Procedural memory is primarily employed in learning motor skills and should be considered a subset of implicit memory.

It is revealed when we do better in a given task due only to repetition - no new explicit memories have been formed, but we are unconsciously accessing aspects of those previous experiences. Procedural memory involved in motor learning depends on the cerebellum and basal ganglia.

### **The Physiology of Memory**

Brain areas such as the hippocampus, the amygdala or the mammillary bodies and are thought to be involved in certain kinds of memory. For example, the hippocampus is believed to be involved in spatial learning and declarative learning. It has been demonstrated that damage to these structures can result in impaired performance on certain memory tasks.

However, it is not sufficient to describe memory, and its counterpart learning, as solely dependant on specific brain regions. Learning and memory are attributable to changes in numerous neuronal synapses.

## General Knowledge Mnemonics

- Beginning music students trying to memorize the notes of the staff use the mnemonics "Every Good Boy Does Fine" and "FACE" for the lines and spaces of the Treble Clef respectively. The Bass Clef equivalents are "Good Boys Do Fine Always" and "All Cows Eat Grass". Note: This method of "remembering" note positions on treble and bass clefs will lead to problems later on in music study. It is much better to learn the note positions on the grand staff as a whole and regard the treble and bass clefs as markers.

- The acronym HOMES is also a mnemonic aid that can be used to remember the names of the North American Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior). SHMOE is also useful to remember their positions from North to South, "Super Man Helps Every One" to remember their positions from West to East, and if you like, "Sam's Horse Must Eat Oats" helps one to remember their ordering by size from largest to smallest. (See if you can find others!)

- "DOC" represents phases of the Moon by shape: "D" is the waxing moon; "O" the full moon; and "C" the waning moon. In the Southern hemisphere, this is reversed, and the mnemonic is "COD". A French mnemonic is that the waxing moon at its first "premier" quarter phase looks like a 'p', and the waning moon at its last "dernier" quarter looks like a 'd'. In German, the Moon is compared to a handwritten small letter a for "Abnehmen" (waning) and a z for "Zunehmen" (waxing). One more (Northern hemisphere) mnemonic, which works for most Romance languages, says that the Moon is a liar: it spells "C", as in crescere (Italian for "to grow") when it waxes, and "D" as in decrescere ("decrease") when it wanes.

- A mnemonic for remembering the number of days in the months of the year, practically a cultural universal in the United States, is "Thirty days hath September/April, June and November." (Although this is only part of a longer rhyme, this is the only part that most people remember, so they commonly complete it with words similar to "... except February, which has twenty-eight, or twenty-nine in a leap year." The full mnemonic is "Thirty days hath September/April, June and November/All the rest have thirty-one/except February alone/which has eight and a score/until leap year gives it one day more.")

- Another mnemonic for the days of the months is not a rhyme or a jingle, but a gestalt. Whereas the traditional mnemonic simply associates the name of the month with the number of days, this one emphasizes the sequence. The 31 and less-than-31-day months would be easy to remember if they simply alternated, but this pattern was broken in 27 B.C. by the decision to rename the month of Sextilis to Augustus and to increase its length from 30 to 31 days. Thus the fourth 31-day month, July, is immediately followed by another 31-day month.

Since the human hand has four fingers, one can, given an appropriate mind-set, perceive this pattern in a view of the knuckles of two fists, held together. The raised knuckles can be seen as the 31-day months, the dips between them as the 30-day-months-and-February, and the gap between the hands ignored. (Thus: left-hand-pinky-knuckle = January, dip = February, left-hand-ring-knuckle = March, dip = April, and so on to left-hand-index-knuckle = July; then continue with right-hand-index-knuckle = August, dip = September, etc).

- Let's not forget the word that reminds us that the best plan is usually a simple plan: K-I-S-S (Keep it Simple, Silly!) A curious characteristic of many memory systems is that mnemonic

devices work despite being (or possibly because of being) illogical, arbitrary, and artistically flawed. "Roy" is a legitimate first name, but there is no actual surname "Biv" and of course the middle initial "G" is arbitrary. Why is "Roy G. Biv" easy to remember? Medical students never forget the arbitrary nationalities of the Finn and German.

Any two of the three months ending in -ember would fit just as euphoniously as September and November in "Thirty days hath...", yet most people can remember the rhyme correctly for a lifetime after having heard it once, and are never troubled by doubts as to which two of the -ember months have thirty days. A bizarre arbitrary association may stick in the mind better than a logical one.

## **History of Mnemonics**

The Ars memoriae (art of memory) practiced in the Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance periods relied on the capacity of the brain for recalling spatial detail. The principle was to initially memorize some large building, the more architectural elaboration of rooms, passages and niches it had the better ó the so-called 'Memory Palace'.

Mnemonic images could be placed about this palace to link to items that you wanted to remember, usually in symbolic form, with the images as striking as possible to enable recollection. To recall something, the practitioner mentally moved around the palace, reviewing the images in order. This was an essential technique of rhetoricians and preachers.

A reference to this technique survives to this day in the common English phrases "in the first place," "in the second place," and so forth.

## **Mnemonics**

A mnemonic is a memory aid. Mnemonics are often verbal, are sometimes in verse form, and are often used to remember lists. Mnemonics rely not only on repetition to remember facts, but also on creating associations among easy-to-remember constructs and lists of data. The word mnemonic shares etymology with Mnemosyne, the name of the titan who personified Memory in Greek mythology.

## **Examples of Simple Mnemonics**

One common mnemonic device for remembering lists consists of an easily remembered word, phrase, or rhyme whose initials or other characteristics are associated with the list items. The idea lends itself well, to memorizing hard-to-break passwords, as well.

## **Science and technology**

- The name Roy G. Biv helps us to remember the order of the colors in the spectrum. In England "Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain" is popular (Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet). In an alternate version, "Battle" is replaced with "Birth".

- A mnemonic to remember which way to turn common (right handed) screws and nuts, including light bulbs is "Lefty loosey, righty tighty."

- A mnemonic used by physics students to remember the Maxwell relations in thermodynamics is "Good Physicists Have Studied Under Very Fine Teachers", which helps them remember the order of the variables in the square, in clockwise direction. Another mnemonic used here is "Valid Facts and Theoretical Understanding Generate Solutions to Hard Problems", which gives the letter in the normal left to right writing direction.

- Chemistry students use the phrase "LEO says GER" to keep the two halves of a redox process straight, since the Loss of Electrons is Oxidation while the Gain of Electrons is Reduction. Another version is the word "OIL-RIG", meaning Oxidation Is Loss, Reduction Is Gain (of electrons).

- Stellar classification uses a peculiar group of letters, easily remembered using the phrase, "Oh Be A Fine Girl, Kiss Me Right Now Sweetie."

- For naming the planets in order from the Sun, the phrases: "My Very Easy Memory Jingle Seems Useful Naming Planets", "Man Very Early Made Jars Stand Up Nearly Perfect", and My Very Eager Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas."

- Many mnemonics have been devised for remembering the digits of pi, consisting of phrases or verses in which successive digits of pi are obtained by counting the number of letters in each word. (Fortunately, the first thirty digits of pi contain no zeroes). Some are:

"May I have a large container of coffee?" (May = 3, I = 1, have = 4, etc.)

"May I have a large container of orange juice?"

"How I want a drink, alcoholic of course, after the heavy lectures involving quantum mechanics!"

(Alternate version of previous) "How I need a drink, alcoholic in nature, after the heavy lectures involving quantum mechanics!"

"How I wish I could recollect pi easily today."

- "Red, right, return," used to remember which sea mark denotes which side of a sailing channel.

- The phrase "Bad Boys Rape Our Young Girls But Violet Gives Willingly" but is used to remember the electronic color codes of resistors, capacitors and other electronic components. A milder version is "Bright Boys Rave Over Young Girls But Veto Getting Wed."

- "King Xerxes Can Seduce Lovely Princesses" aids in remembering the microwave frequency bands, in order of increasing wavelength.

- A well-known mnemonic used to remember the 12 cranial nerves uses no profanity but isn't politically correct: "Oh Oh Oh, To Touch And Feel A Girl, Very Sexy & Hot." The clean version is making ground though, and it goes like this: "On Old Olympus' Tiny Top A Finn And German Viewed Some Hops," or "On Old Olympus' Towering Top A Finely Vested German Viewed A Hawk" (with variations; some say "terraced tops" or "topmost top", and "viewed some hops" is sometimes rendered as "vaulted a hedge"). A profane example is "Some Anatomists Like F\*\*king, Others Prefer S & M" for the external carotid artery branches. Medical mnemonics are quite common, see (<http://www.medicalmnemonics.com>).

- Visual mnemonics are also popular in medicine as well as other fields. In this technique, an image portrays characters or objects whose name sounds like the item that has to be memorized. This object then interacts with other similarly portrayed objects that in turn represent associated information. For example a drug name "hydralazine" could be represented as "lazy hydra" that is on strike holding a sign "NO more work". "NO" in the above case symbolizes Nitric Oxide, which is related to the drug's mechanism of action. For examples of this technique, see (<http://www.mediglyphics.com/public/Pharmacology/>).

- A way of remembering biological groupings in taxonomy is the phrase "Kings Play Cards On Fat Green Stools", "Kings Play Chess On Fine Grained Sand", "Kings Play Chess Often For Great Sport", and also "Kings Play Chess On Funny Green Squares". Another mnemonic for this purpose is "Kids Prefer Cheese Over Fried Green Spinach". Yet another is "King Phillip Came Over For Good Spaghetti". Or "King Penguins Copulate Often For Greater Satisfaction" also works, as does Kevin Please Come Over For Gay Sex, as was popularized on the program TV Funhouse. The letters stand for Kingdom, Phylum, Class (biology), Order (biology), Family (biology), Genus, and Species.

- Many people remember the Order of Operation in Maths with the word Brackets Of (fractions: 1/2 of 2) Division Multiplication Addition Subtraction (BODMAS or BOMDAS).

- Many young Australian children remember the compass points in order in clockwise with the phrase Never Eat Soggy Weetbix (North, East, South, West). Weetbix is a popular breakfast cereal in Australia. Another variation is Never Ever Smoke Weed.

- Many secondary school students remember the basic trigonometric functions with the phrase SOH-CAH-TOA (pronounced "soak a toe-uh")

- SOH ... Sine = Opposite leg divided by the Hypotenuse
- CAH ... Cosine = Adjacent leg divided by the Hypotenuse
- TOA ... Tangent = Opposite leg divided by the Adjacent leg

- Many biology students use the tune of "Row row row your boat" to assist in remembering the characteristics of DNA:

We love DNA,  
Made of nucleotides,  
A phosphate, sugar and a base,  
Bonded down one side.

Adenine and Thymine,  
Make a lovely pair,  
Guanine without Cytosine,  
Would be very bare.

## **List of Common Mnemonics**

This article contains a list of some common verbal mnemonics.

Most of these mnemonics consist of a simple phrase in which the first letter of each word either spells something out, or matches the first word of some sequence.

### **Music**

- Notes on treble clef lines (E, G, B, D, F) o Every Good Boy Does Fine (also Deserves Favour or Deserves Fudge or Deserves Fruit)
- Notes on bass clef lines (G, B, D, F, A) - Good Boys Do Fine Always
- Notes on treble clef spaces (F, A, C, E) - spell out the word face
- Notes on bass clef spaces (A, C, E, G) - All Cows Eat Grass; All Cars Eat Gas
- Order of sharps/flats in key signatures - for sharps: Father Charles Goes Down And Ends Battle; for flats: Battle Ends And Down Goes Charles' Father

### **Science and Math**

- The colors of the spectrum (red, orange, yellow, green blue, indigo, violet) - the contrived name Roy G. Biv spells out the first letters; Richard of York gave battle in vain
- Mohs scale of mineral hardness (talc, gypsum, calcite, fluorite, apatite, orthoclase feldspar, quartz, topaz, corundum, diamond) - tall girls can flirt and other-funny queer things can do
- Elements necessary for agriculture (carbon, hydrogen, calcium, iron, magnesium, manganese, copper, molybdenum, chlorine, boron) - C(see) Hopkins Café, Mighty-good; Man, Cu(see your) Money, hope they are Closed or out of Business.
- The periodic order of the Lanthanide elements: (Lanthanum, Caesium, Praseodymium, Neodymium, Promethium, Samarium, Europium, Gadolinium, Terbium, Dysprosium, Holmium, Erbium, Thulium, Ytterbium, Lutetium) - Late College Parties Never Produce Sexy European Girls That Drink Heavily Even Though You Look
- Stellar spectral classifications (O, B, A, F, G, K, M) o Oh Be A Fine Girl, Kiss Me!

- Planets (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto) - My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine Pickles; My Very Easy Memory Jingle Seems Useful Naming Planets

- Scientific classification sequence (kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, species) - King Philip came over for green spaghetti (or great sex); kinky people care only for good sex; King Philip classifies ordered families as generally specious

- Compass directions: (north, east, south, west) o never eat soggy waffles

- Digits of pi (3, 1, 4, 1, 5, 9, 2, 6, ...) can be remembered by counting the number of letters in the words of the phrases - May I have a large container of coffee?; How I wish I could recollect pi; How I want a drink, alcoholic of course, after the heavy lectures involving quantum mechanics and by the verse Now I will a rhyme construct By chosen words the young instruct; Cunningly devised endeavour! Con it and remember ever. Widths in circle here you see Sprawled out in strange obscurity.

- The basic trigonometric functions in relation to the parts of a right triangle: (sine = opposite/hypotenuse, cosine = adjacent/hypotenuse, tangent = opposite/adjacent) - Chief Sohcahtoa (Soh: sine opposite hypotneuse, etc.)

- Which trigonometric function is positive in a quadrant: (I, all; II, sine; III, tangent; IV, cosine); all students take calculus; all state teachers college

- Operation precedences (parentheses, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, subtraction); please excuse my dear aunt sally

## **Medicine**

Note: medical students have developed far too many medical mnemonics over the years to list; only a sample is given here:

- The cranial nerves - on old olympus' tiny top a finn and german viewed some hops; oh oh oh to touch a fresh virgin girl's vagina and hymen; oh oh oh to touch and feel very green vegetables and herbs

(Most others are equally vulgar.)

## **History**

- English and British Monarchs: this poem has been used by English schoolchildren Willie Willie Harry Stee (William I, William II, Henry I, Stephen)

Harry Dick John Harry three; (Henry II, Richard I, John, Henry III)

One two three Neds, Richard two (Edward I, Edward II, Edward III, Richard II)

Harrys four five six, then who? (Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI)

Edwards four five, Dick the bad, (Edward IV, Edward V, Richard III)

Harrys (twain), Ned six (the lad); (Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI)

Mary, Bessie, James you ken, (Mary I, Elizabeth I, James I)

Then Charlie, Charlie, James (Charles I, Charles II, James II)

again...

Will and Mary, Anna Gloria, (William III, Mary II, Anne)

(George I, George II, George III, George IV, William IV Georges four, Will four, Victoria;  
Victoria)

Edward seven next, and then (Edward VII)

Came George the fifth in (George V)

nineteen-ten;

Ned the eighth soon abdicated (Edward VIII)

Then George six was coronated; (George VI)

After which Elizabeth (Elizabeth II)

Has the throne, until her death

- 543210 is a mnemonic for the date when prohibition was lifted in Finland: 5th April (4th month) 1932 at 10 in the morning (local time). Miscellaneous

- Order of the suits in bridge (spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs) - Sally has dirty children

- Resistor color code (black = 0, blue = 1, red = 2, etc.) - bad boys rape our young girls behind victory garden walls

- The number of days in each Month in the year is often remembered using the following verse:

Thirty days hath September,  
April June and November,  
All the rest have thirty-one,  
Except February has twenty-eight.

(sometimes September and November are interchanged). A more complete version goes something like:

Thirty days hath September,  
April June and November,  
All the rest have thirty-one,  
Except February alone,  
Which has eight and a score,  
Until leap year gives it one more.

## **Mnemonic Techniques**

A mnemonic technique is one of many memory aids that is used to create associations among facts that make it easier to remember these facts. Popular mnemonic techniques include mind mapping and peg lists. These techniques make use of the power of the visual cortex to simplify the complexity of memories.

Thus simpler memories can be stored more efficiently. For example, a number can be remembered as a picture. This makes it easier to retrieve it from memory. Mnemonic techniques should be used in conjunction with active recall to actually be beneficial. For example, it is not enough to look at a mind map; one needs to actively reconstruct it in one's memory.

Other methods for remembering arbitrary numbers or number sequences use numerological (lit. number+word) systems such as the abjad, where each numeral is represented by a consonant sound. These systems take advantage of the memory's ability to store more information by organizing it into "chunks".

An example of a widely used system for memorizing numbers as words is the major system.

### **Number rhyme system**

This is an example of a "peg list". It is useful for remembering ordered lists, especially for people with strong auditory learning styles. The following numbered list is static. Note the rhyme of the digit and the word (one/bun, two/glue, and so on). The items you wish to remember should be associated with each word. A similar system utilizing a combination of this and the preceding "abjad" system can easily yield numbers through 100 or higher (ex. 76 lash, 77 lilly)

1. bun 2. glue 3. tea 4. door 5. hive 6. bricks 7. heaven 8. slate 9. line 10. pen Egg and spear  
or number shape system

This is another peg system, much like the number-rhyme system but more suitable for those with visual learning styles (a one looks like a candle; a two looks like a swan, and so on).

1. Candle, spear 2. Swan 3. Bosom 4. Sail 5. Hook 6. Club 7. Cliff

8. Hourglass 9. Flag 10. Egg Other mnemonic systems

- Mnemonic verses
- Acronym System
- Link System
- Story System
- Journey System
- Room System
- Peg System including number-rhyme, number-shape, and number-consonant conversions.
- Major System
- Goroawase System

## **Amnesia**

Amnesia is a condition in which memory is disturbed or lost altogether. The causes of amnesia are organic or functional. Organic causes include damage to the brain, through trauma or disease, or use of certain (generally sedative) drugs. Functional causes are psychological factors, such as defense mechanisms. Hysterical post-traumatic amnesia is an example of this. Amnesia may also be spontaneous, in the case of transient global amnesia. This global type of amnesia is more common in middle-aged to elderly people, particularly males, and usually lasts less than 24 hours.

Amnesia can be temporary. As someone recovers, older memories will generally return first. The memories of the event that caused the amnesia are often never recalled.

Treatment varies according to the type of amnesia and the cause of the problem. By studying the different forms of amnesia, it has become possible to observe apparent defects in individual sub-systems of the brain's memory systems, and thus hypothesize their function in the normally working brain. Sufferers from Amnesia should seek prompt medical attention.

## **Alzheimer's Disease**

Alzheimer's disease (AD) or senile dementia of Alzheimer's type is a neurodegenerative disease, which results in a loss of mental functions due to the deterioration of brain tissue. Its exact etiology (cause) is still unknown, but environmental as well as genetic factors are thought to contribute (mutations in at least four genes predisposing to AD have been identified).

Until the 1960s, the disease was thought to be uncommon, but later it was realized that much of what had been regarded as the normal process of aging was actually the result of this disease.

The typical visible symptom is progressive and chronic memory loss. Alzheimer's disease is also manifested in behavioral changes, which may include confusion, disorientation, sudden periods of defiance, abusive behavior, or violence, etc. in people who have no previous history of such behavior (rarely, an affected person experiences euphoria).

Thus, Alzheimer's disease presents a considerable problem in patient management, as well. Average duration is approximately 10 years. The disease duration has been noted to vary as very roughly half of the normal life expectancy of a healthy person of the same age as the patient in whom the Alzheimer's is diagnosed, subject to a maximum of 10 to 12 years for those diagnosed at a young age.

### **Alzheimer's: The Most Common Form of Dementia**

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, as well as one of the most commonly diagnosed degenerative diseases in the United States. Alzheimer's affects nearly 4 million families in the United States, and it is estimated that roughly twenty-five percent to fifty percent of all individuals over 85 years of age will be stricken with Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's is one of the most wrenching diseases that any individual and their family can face. When Alzheimer's strikes, family members are forced to stand by and watch as the memories of a beloved family member slowly begin to fade. Alzheimer's patients may become irritable, display feelings of paranoia, and even act aggressively toward family members. On average, death occurs roughly ten years after diagnosis.

### **Possible Causes of Alzheimer's disease**

One of the aspects of Alzheimer's that makes it so difficult for doctors and their patients to deal with is that we know very little about Alzheimer's disease. It appears that Alzheimer's is caused by a combination of factors. Most researchers believe the disease is caused by a combination of genetic factors and environmental factors.

Researchers estimate that about half of all diagnosed cases of Alzheimer's were caused by genetic factors. Some researchers believe that a virus causes Alzheimer's disease. If we can find the cause of the virus, it follows that we can create a vaccine against it.

### **Diagnosing Alzheimer's disease**

Diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease rests on definitions provided by two professional classifications. There are currently two professional diagnostic tools to determine if an individual is suffering from Alzheimer's, or some other form of dementia. The first and most widely used diagnostic tool is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). The other professional diagnostic criteria are derived from the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke-Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorder Association (NINDS-ADRDA).

The criteria for diagnosing Alzheimer's include:

- Memory Loss. Alzheimer's patients will begin to lose short-term memory. As the illness progresses, patients begin to lose memory of familiar friends, family members, objects, and places.

- Loss of mobility, or impaired ability to perform everyday tasks.
- Disorientation and wandering. Alzheimer's patients may become disoriented in familiar places. Alzheimer's patients may also roam and wander away from their home.
- Impaired language ability. Many Alzheimer's patients lose the ability to converse with ease. They may grasp for words, or find themselves incapable of telling a coherent story.
- Aggression, paranoia
- Chronic insomnia and depression

Many tests are also used to diagnose Alzheimer's disease. Blood and urine tests are used to rule out other problems. Imaging tests are also used, including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computerized tomography (CT), and positron emission tomography (PET) scans.

These scans may reveal if brain tissue has measurably shrunk, if protein deposits have appeared, and if cavities in the brain have enlarged. These tests can give physicians a good sense of whether a patient is suffering from Alzheimer's. However, the only definitive tests involve the autopsy and examination of the patient's brain cells.

### **The Three Stages of Alzheimer's disease**

Alzheimer's disease manifests itself in three distinct stages. In the first stage, the patient begins to demonstrate signs of memory loss. They may forget where objects are located, and may forget common words throughout the course of normal conversation. The second stage, the patient begins to demonstrate significant impairment in cognitive ability.

They may be incapable of carrying on a coherent conversation, and may begin to forget familiar faces. In the third and final stage, the patient becomes incapable of taking care of him or herself. They may become physically impaired, increasingly irritable, and forget their closest acquaintances.

### **Treatment of Alzheimer's**

Unfortunately, there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease. If diagnosed early, the patient can be prescribed certain medications that may delay the onset of symptoms. These medications include aricept, exelon, and reminyl. Medications can also be used to treat symptoms of Alzheimer's, such as the insomnia, anxiety, depression, and aggression that can accompany the disease.

Many Alzheimer's patients suffer from other health problems that may exacerbate the symptoms of Alzheimer's. Anemia, nutritional deficiencies, and thyroid disease are often comorbid with Alzheimer's. These may also be treated with medications to put the patient at ease.

## **Diagnosing Dementia: Symptoms to Look for**

Dementia is a brain dysfunction that leads to a loss in being able to function with daily activities. Dementia can take place in many different forms, and causes you to lose several different ways of functioning. Alzheimer's disease is one of the most common forms of dementia. By knowing what symptoms to look for, you will be able to diagnose dementia and help others or yourself in recovering from the dysfunction.

One of the most recognizable mental symptoms of dementia is confusion. This confusion will cause one to not be able to recognize the daily activities that they are supposed to do. At certain points, those with dementia can't tell who their friends, family and loved ones are as well. The confusion that results from dementia then takes on several different mental forms that function every day living.

The second part of dementia is related to an impaired memory and orientation. Those with dementia will constantly not be able to find things and will lose sense of their body in relation to their mind. Forgetting routines is one way in which this memory becomes impaired. Forgetting where things are in your own home is another sign of this impaired memory.

Often times, the forgetfulness will affect work as one will forget appointments or names of those around them. The disorientation will also include a loss in being able to recognize space and surroundings. The spatial and temporal orientation is usually associated with this.

Concentration is another part of dementia that is affected. Overtime, the levels of concentration that one may have will start to diminish. A lack of focus as well as the inability to stay on one task for a long time is affected by dementia. Oftentimes, those with dementia will have a hard time concentrating on having a conversation as well.

The next thing that will be noticeable is a lack of planning and judgment. These are often times a result of the loss of memory. It is also part of the confusion towards external activities that are taking place. Lack of planning and judgment is often a result of the other symptoms that have taken affect in dementia.

Personality changes also begin to take a role in the characteristics of dementia. One may notice that one who is getting dementia will begin to change their attitude towards you as well as the environment around them. These personality changes are not as noticeable at first. However, as time goes on, mood swings will begin to take place.

If you see someone who is beginning to have dementia, they may go through a phase of being happy in one minute and angry in another. Another part of this is that typical responses to situations and people will begin to change dramatically with their responses.

The last type of symptoms that are developed with dementia involves speech and walking disorders. With speech, this will begin by one not being able to use simple words anymore, and will have a hard time finding the right words to use when communicating. The body will then begin to shut down and not be able to function properly.

Not being able to swallow properly, for example, is one of the physical effects that take place. The later stages of dementia, or Alzheimer's, will often cause the person to not be able to walk at all. Speech will become inconsistent and slurred, as it loses its functioning in relation to the brain.

Dementia, as well as Alzheimer's disease occurs because the nerve cells in the brain begin to deconstruct instead of grow. This result, instead of naturally occurring, happens at a fast pace. It is also known to be a result of different genetic mutations that occur. These begin to take effect in one's older age, causing the nerve cells to break down faster.

Dementia can become a serious mental illness, especially in relation to Alzheimer's disease. The confusion that begins with dementia is a first sign that you should find help to slow down the nerve cells in your brain from deconstructing. If you see that someone you know is forgetting things, having a hard time communicating, or is taking on severe mood swing and personality changes, then it is important to find them the right help.

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