

An elderly couple is shown from the chest up, laughing joyfully. The man on the left has white hair and a beard, wearing a light blue shirt. The woman on the right has white hair and is wearing a grey jacket over a light blue shirt. They are outdoors with green foliage in the background. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent purple band across the middle of the image.

# *Dementia*

*Everything You Need To Know*

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We received a lot of requests to write a complete guide on what is **dementia**. Thus we bring you this overview of the syndrome, causes, diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and more.

## Dementia Definition

Dementia is an overall term that describes a wide range of medical conditions that are characterized by abnormal changes in the brain.

The illness, also known as a major neurocognitive disorder, can either be progressive or chronic.

These changes often trigger numerous negative changes like a decline in cognitive abilities that end up impairing a person's independence; thus, affecting their day-to-day lives.

It is important to note that the illness is not a normal part of growing older.

## Signs and Symptoms of Dementia

Because dementia is not a specific disease, its [signs and symptoms](#) vary widely from one person to the next.

It is best to categorize dementia warning signs into three categories including

## Cognitive Changes

These may include:

- [Memory loss](#)
- Trouble with [communication](#) (both spoken and written)
- A hard time with complex tasks
- Challenges with [visual](#) and spatial abilities like getting lost in familiar places
- Difficulties with planning, organizing, problem-solving, and reasoning
- Troubles with coordination functions
- Disorientation and confusion



## Psychological Changes

Several psychological changes can also be an indication that a person may be suffering from the neurodegenerative disorder like:

- [Agitation](#)
- Personality changes
- [Paranoia](#)
- [Depression](#)
- [Anxiety](#)
- Inappropriate behavior
- [Mood changes](#)
- Loss of initiative
- [Incontinence](#)
- [Hallucinations](#)

## Physical Changes

When talking about common signs of dementia, it is only right to mention some [physical changes](#) that may occur to a person who has dementia like:

- Poor hygiene, [grooming and dressing](#) habits
- [Insomnia](#) or an increase in daytime napping
- Decreased fine motor skills
- Repetitive behaviors
- Stiff or weak muscles
- Fatigue
- [Seizures](#)
- Trouble controlling bowels or bladder

Worth noting is that the symptoms develop gradually during the onset of the illness and become worse as the disease progresses.

It is also necessary to understand the importance of [pain in patients with dementia](#).

Even though dementia does not cause pain, sufferers are at higher risk of hurting themselves.

## Dementia Stages

Dementia typically progresses slowly in 4 [stages](#) as explained below.

### Mild Cognitive Impairment

At this stage, a person will not have any [dementia warning signs](#). Tests, however, may reveal that there is a problem.

### Very Mild Decline

Also known as [early-stage dementia](#), there are not too many changes that happen to people at this stage. A majority can still function independently.

However, they may experience memory lapses like misplacing things or forgetting familiar words.

### Moderate Dementia (middle-stage dementia<)

It is one of the stages where [common signs of dementia](#) become more profound.

Individuals may become angry, frustrated, have trouble communicating or refuse to shower.

The extent of damage to the brain nerve cells may also make it challenging for a person to perform daily tasks without assistance or properly express their thoughts.

## Severe Dementia (late-stage dementia)

A person with the illness may showcase severe [end-stage dementia signs](#).

Individuals often lose their ability to control movement, respond to the environment, or carry out conversations.

At this stage, individuals with dementia may require extensive care as their cognitive and memory skills continue to become worse.

The rate of progression will be different for different people. Overall health, age, and genetics may play a role in how fast or slow the disease progresses.

## Causes of Dementia

Dementia is primarily caused by damage to the brain cells, which ends up interfering with communication between brain cells.

When the brain cells, cannot effectively communicate with each other, it ends up affecting feelings, thinking, and [behavior](#).

Over the years, scientists have documented numerous possible causes of dementia. Below is a list of some of the most common dementia causes:

### 1. Degenerative neurological diseases

These are medical conditions that progressively attack brain connections and cells.

It is mostly seen in Alzheimer's disease, Huntington's disease, Parkinson's disease, and some kinds of [multiple sclerosis](#).

## 2. Brain injuries

Repeated [brain injuries](#) or single trauma – this may be a result of concussions, falls, or car accidents, etc.

## 3. Cerebrovascular causes

These are normally a result of [heart disease](#), [strokes](#), or hardening of the blood vessels that supply the brain with oxygen and other vital nutrients.

## 4. Vascular disorders

These are the disorders that affect how blood circulates in the human brain.

## 5. Drug and alcohol abuse

Long-term drug or [alcohol](#) abuse

## 6. Nutrition

Poor nutrition and [dehydration](#). Long-term [vitamin B12 deficiency](#) is also one of the causes.

## 7. Infections

Infections of the central nervous system like HIV, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, and meningitis.

## 8. Brain fluid

Some kinds of hydrocephalus which described build-up of brain fluid.

## 9. Metabolic and toxic causes

Dementia can also be a result of chemicals imbalance in the human body that is caused by biological conditions like metabolic disorders or toxins such as lead.



In addition to the above, it is also important to note that there are some [reversible dementia causes](#) like medication side effects, depression, and thyroid problems.

Some studies are also coming up to determine the exact causes of dementia. For instance, some researchers are looking to answer the question can we link [gum disease and Alzheimer's](#).

## Dementia Diagnosis

To date, the medical fraternity has not yet identified one test that can be used to diagnose dementia. [Doctors](#) will instead diagnose dementia using several factors like

### Lab tests

This normally includes testing an individual's blood as well as other fluids to check for levels of hormones, vitamins, and chemicals which can help to rule out or find possible causes of different symptoms.

### Neurological Tests

These assess sensory response, balance, reflexes, and other cognitive functions ([cognitive reserve](#)) that can help identify disorders that may affect diagnosis.

### Carefully reviewing a person's medical history

Doctors in charge may ask whether there has been dementia in a family and how the symptoms began to manifest.

The professionals may also ask questions about the medications that a person is taking which might cause the symptoms or make them worse.

Doctors can also inquire about changes in personality or behavior.

## Physical Examinations

It normally involves measuring vital signs like blood pressure which can help doctors identify conditions that can occur with dementia or lead to its development.

## Neuropsychological tests

These are done to assess problem-solving, memory, math skills, language skill, and other abilities that relate to mental functioning.

## Brain Scans

These are done to identify tumors, strokes, and other health issues that can lead to the development of dementia.

The scans can also identify any changes that occur to the brain.

The most common scans include MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) one of the reasons it is common for people to ask [can MRI detect dementia?](#)

[CT](#) (Computed Tomography) and [PET](#) (Positron Emission Tomography) are other scans that are used for brain scans.

## Genetic Tests

Experts reckon that some dementia has a gene defect. In such cases, genetic tests can prove to be useful when people want to know if they are at risk of developing dementia.

## Psychiatric Evaluations

These will help to determine if mental conditions like depression are playing a part in the symptoms that a person is showcasing.

Medics combine the above to determine whether a person has dementia.

It is usually hard to tell which type of dementia a person is suffering from because a majority of brain changes and symptoms of different kinds of dementia overlap.

When a doctor is not able to diagnose the specific dementia type it is recommended that a person sees a specialist like a geropsychologist or a [neurologist](#) who will help with the proper diagnosis.

Keep in mind that [early detection of symptoms](#) is very important in case doctors can treat some of the reversible causes.

## How to Treat Dementia

Sadly many types of dementia are [incurable](#). Doctors, however, try to use various treatment options to try and manage symptoms.

One of the ways that this is done is through prescribing drugs.

There are several medications like cholinesterase inhibitors and memantine that can be used to temporarily improve some dementia symptoms.

## Doctor consultation

It is important that a person who has dementia widely consults with their doctor before they start taking any drugs.

They should also report any side effects they are experiencing after taking the drugs to see if the physician can switch things up.

Persons who have dementia can also try alternative treatments as a way of dealing with some of the symptoms that are related to the neurodegenerative illness.

Examples of this include [music therapy](#) and dementia patients, [occupational therapy](#), [doll therapy and dementia](#), [aromatherapy](#), [reminiscence therapy](#), art therapy, and [massage therapy](#).

You can also look into [omega 3](#) and dementia or [acupuncture](#) when looking for some of the dementia treatment options.

There are also various other different [natural ways to treat dementia](#).

In most cases, dementia treatment will depend on its cause.

## Is dementia reversible?

Around 20% of dementia causes are reversible.

These may include drug & alcohol abuse, low levels of thyroid hormones, tumors, blood clots, metabolic disorders, low blood sugar, [HIV associated neurocognitive disorders](#).

Some home and lifestyle remedies can also help persons who have [living with dementia](#). These can include modifying environments to [create a dementia-friendly home](#).

Staying physically fit, eating a [good dementia diet](#), taking part in [social activities](#), and [establishing a routine](#) can help improve the quality of life for someone who has the illness.

Remember to explore all treatment options with extreme caution because most of the remedies are not regulated and the benefits of the same are not always based on solid scientific research.

## Tips for Dementia Prevention

Researchers continue to study dementia to recommend the steps that people can take to prevent its development.

To date, several suggestions are available for a person who wants to reduce the risk of getting dementia and these are:

- Sticking to a healthy diet
- Quit [smoking](#)
- Exercising regularly
- [Cognitive stimulation](#)
- Controlling weight
- Avoiding harmful use of alcohol
- Maintaining healthy [blood pressure](#), blood sugar and [cholesterol levels](#)
- Avoiding [risk factors](#) like [social isolation](#), depression, and cognitive inactivity
- [Quality sleep](#)

## Types of Dementia

There are different types of dementia and we will briefly discuss some of the most common types below.

### Alzheimer's Disease

[Alzheimer's disease](#) accounts for about 60-80% of dementia cases making it the most common type.

Early diagnosis is crucial because it can help prolong the independence and it also instrumental when it comes to treatment and management of the disease.

Make sure you do not ignore the most common [signs of Alzheimer's](#).

## Vascular Dementia

[Vascular dementia](#) refers to the decline in thinking skills that is as a result of medical conditions that reduce or block blood flow to various brain regions depriving them of nutrients and oxygen.

Learn all about [vascular dementia prognosis and progression](#) to get in-depth details of this type of dementia.

## Dementia with Lewy Bodies

[Lewy Body dementia](#) is one of the rapidly progressive dementia types that leads to a decline in independent function, reasoning, and thinking.

This normally happens when there are abnormal microscopic deposits in the brain that end up damaging cells over time.

## Frontotemporal Dementia

Also known as [frontotemporal degenerations](#) these describe a group of disorders that are a result of progressive nerve cell loss in the frontal or temporal lobes located in the brain.

This leads to loss of brain function in these areas which ends up causing deterioration in personality and behavior as well as difficulties with understanding or producing language.

## Huntington's Disease

This refers to a progressive brain disorder that a defective gene causes. [Huntington's Disease](#) brings about changes in the brain's central area which ends up affecting thinking skills, mood, and movement.

## Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

This is a prion disease that occurs when prion proteins begin to fold into abnormal shapes in the brain. This results in a type of dementia that worsens fast.

[Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease](#) is, however, a rare disease and it is estimated that only one person in a million gets it globally.

## Mixed Dementia

This is where a person can experience more than one type of dementia at the same time.

In most cases, vascular dementia will simultaneously occur with [Alzheimer's disease](#), causing the development of [mixed dementia](#).

## Parkinson's Disease Dementia

[Parkinson's disease dementia](#) describes a decline in reasoning and thinking that often occurs to persons who have lived with Parkinson's for about 12 months after a positive diagnosis.

## Is Dementia Hereditary?

A majority of [dementia cases are not passed](#) on to grandchildren or children. However, there may be a genetic link in some of the rare dementia types.

This usually happens when a person develops dementia at an earlier age say less than 60 years implying that there are greater chances of the illness being passed on.

Familial Alzheimer's disease is one of the rare dementia types that can be passed from one generation to the next.

Other dementia forms that can be inherited include some type of Fronto Temporal Lobar Degeneration and Huntington's disease.

## Tests for Dementia

As previously mentioned, doctors use a combination of [tests](#) to determine whether a person is suffering from dementia.

To recap these may include memory ability tests, [blood tests](#) and other lab tests, neurological tests, and brain scans to mention a few.

The doctor will determine the type of tests that a person will take depending on their symptoms and how they are currently behaving.

New tests like the [peanut butter test](#) for Alzheimer's are also being studied to help with a dementia diagnosis.

## Dementia in Men and Women

Numerous studies indicate that [women](#) have a higher chance of developing dementia than [men](#).

Several studies have different explanations as to why women have a higher risk of getting dementia.

Some say that it is perhaps because the life expectancy for ladies is higher than that of men and dementia generally affects older people.

Some studies also reveal that the rate of brain cell death is faster in women than in men.



Others state that ladies have twice the risk of getting depression one of the factors that might lead to dementia development.

There is also a notion that women work out less than men and statistics indicate that people who exercise less are at higher risk of getting dementia.

This conclusion, however, has been based on limited data and more research needs to be done to come up with a conclusive answer.

## Is It Age-Related Memory Loss or Dementia?

Dementia should never be confused for age-related memory loss.

It is normal for people to experience some level of memory loss as they grow older. This can be occasionally forgetting a phone number, a name, or misplacing an item.

While memory lapses can be frustrating, they do not necessarily mean that a person has dementia.

Older people experience physiological changes that cause some glitches in the functions of the brain.

This is why it may take longer for some seniors to recall or load information.

Most times, if a person is patient, they will end up remembering the details they thought were long-forgotten.

## Keep “challenging” your brain

Keep in mind that the brain can produce new brain cells at any age. However, similar to muscle strengths, a person has to use it or end up losing it.

Habits and lifestyle have significant effects on the brain; thus it is important to keep improving cognitive skills which will protect the grey matter and prevent memory loss.

The main difference between age-related memory loss and dementia is that the former does not cause a disabling decline in intellectual abilities like abstract thinking, judgment, and language.

A person who experiences pervasive and severe memory loss that disrupts life should consult a doctor as they may be having the neurodegenerative disease or other conditions that can be mistaken for dementia.

## Nutrition and Dementia

Many experts are confident that consuming a healthy diet can help prevent dementia or slow down its progression. There is a list of foods that cause dementia that people should avoid at all costs.

Instead, they should opt for [proper nutrition](#) that promotes strong and healthy bodies. Eating [poor nutrition foods](#) contributes to [dementia and weight loss](#) and it can also lead to an increase in behavioral symptoms.

Note: in some cases, a person will start to [eat too much](#) while in the others they will begin to [consume too little food](#).

Caregivers should make mealtimes as smooth as possible for persons with dementia to ensure they are getting enough food and staying hydrated.

There are different aspects people need to consider when talking about nutrition and dementia.

These include how meals are presented, meal times, and [how to encourage independence](#) for a person with dementia to ensure they are eating right.

Caregivers can also consider how specific foods can help persons with the illness.

For instance, how do [coffee and dementia](#) relate? Some experts also state that consuming foods like [chocolate](#), and [coconut](#) can help persons with dementia.

## Dementia Statistics

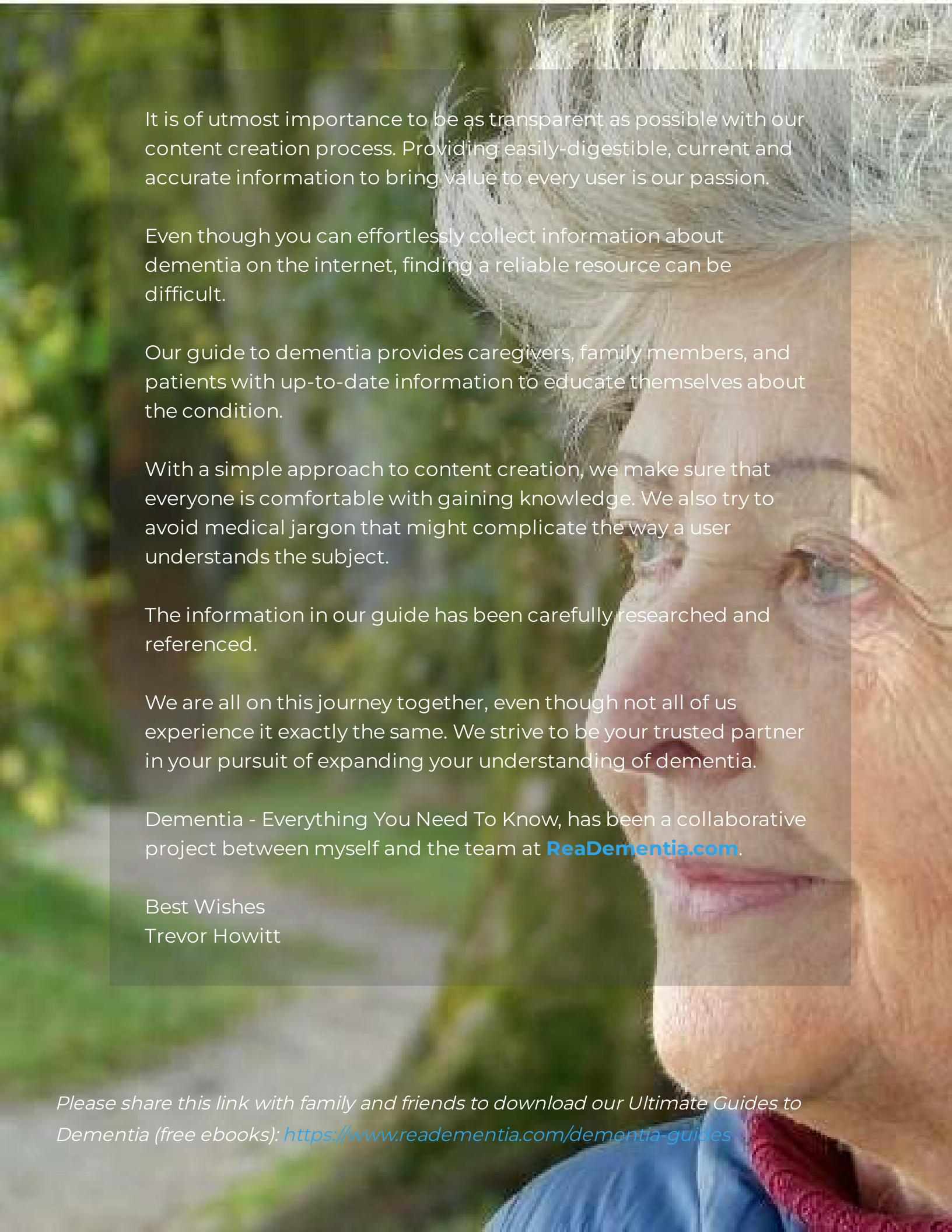
It is important to take note of some global dementia statistics like:

- According to WHO, 50 million people across the globe were already living with dementia in 2015. By 2030, persons with illnesses will likely exceed the 82 million mark. By 2050 the cases may shoot up to 152 million.
- New dementia cases worldwide account for 10 million yearly suggesting that there is a new case diagnosed every 3 seconds.
- Dementia is a costly disease. It is estimated that \$818B per year goes towards the disease.



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It is of utmost importance to be as transparent as possible with our content creation process. Providing easily-digestible, current and accurate information to bring value to every user is our passion.

Even though you can effortlessly collect information about dementia on the internet, finding a reliable resource can be difficult.

Our guide to dementia provides caregivers, family members, and patients with up-to-date information to educate themselves about the condition.

With a simple approach to content creation, we make sure that everyone is comfortable with gaining knowledge. We also try to avoid medical jargon that might complicate the way a user understands the subject.

The information in our guide has been carefully researched and referenced.

We are all on this journey together, even though not all of us experience it exactly the same. We strive to be your trusted partner in your pursuit of expanding your understanding of dementia.

Dementia - Everything You Need To Know, has been a collaborative project between myself and the team at [ReaDementia.com](https://www.readementia.com).

Best Wishes  
Trevor Howitt

Please share this link with family and friends to download our Ultimate Guides to Dementia (free ebooks): <https://www.readementia.com/dementia-guides>