

The Brain, Explained: Understanding Dementia



For a long time, the brain was a mystery. Due to recent advances in neuroscience, or the study of the nervous system, many new and effective treatments are available for conditions that involve or affect the brain, such as dementia.

What is Dementia?

As we head toward our golden years, our brains undergo changes that affect certain areas of thinking, memory, and information processing. As many as half of people ages 85 and older develop dementia, a condition that robs people of their ability to remember, speak, or do other things important to daily life.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia in older adults. Unusual deposits

of proteins form amyloid plaques and tau tangles in the brains of people with this disease, and once-healthy nerve cells (neurons) stop functioning and die. Most other types of dementia also result from damaged or dying neurons.

Getting Treatment

Some dementia-like disorders can be stopped or reversed. Others, including Alzheimer's disease, have no cure. However, there are medications that can improve symptoms. And researchers are currently running clinical trials to test potential ways to prevent dementia, including:

- Exercising
- Eating a nutritious diet
- Maintaining strong social ties

Help for Growing Brains

Dementia can be a problem as we grow older, but mental health problems can occur much earlier in life, too. As you watch your child's body grow and change through the teen years, what you can't see is how his or her brain is still under construction, right on through adolescence. Even though most teens experience positive mental health, one in five has had a serious mental health disorder at some point in his or her life.

If your child has difficulties, he or she is not alone—and help is available. Doctors, including child and adolescent psychiatrists, can recommend the right combination of therapy, medication, and behavior changes for your child.

Sources include U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, and American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.