

Dementia

Dementia is a condition that leads to progressive memory loss, reduced thinking skills and ability to perform daily activities. These losses are not seen to be part of the normal ageing process.

Dementia is caused by damage to the brain cells. This interferes with the ability of brain cells to communicate with one another.

In the early stages, individuals may have difficulties with managing their daily routines or finances, or recalling past events that have happened. As dementia progresses, individuals may experience other mental, emotional, and physical problems, and this can impair their ability to care for themselves and interact with others in the community. Swallowing and feeding difficulties may also occur, putting individuals at risks of malnutrition, dehydration and infections. Swallowing difficulties, if not managed, could lead to recurrent chest infections.

Treatment can slow down the progression of dementia, but not cure the illness. Treatment may help individuals with dementia continue to participate in the daily activities they value, as well as decrease incidences of challenging behaviours, thereby reducing caregiver burden.

How is it treated?

A multi-disciplinary team including, doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, dietitians and medical social workers are jointly involved in caring for individuals with dementia.

What does rehabilitation involve?

The overall aim of rehabilitation is to improve and/or control the symptoms of dementia to maximise an individual's ability in performing his/her daily activities. Part of the rehabilitation process is also about providing support to caregivers caring for individuals with dementia to reduce caregiver stress and burnout.

A variety of compensatory approaches are used during rehabilitation.

Occupational therapists assess the individual's cognitive and functional abilities and advise on task modifications to make daily tasks more manageable. They may suggest customised daily routines to keep the individual physically and mentally engaged. Occupational therapists also work with families and caregivers to identify strategies to manage challenging behaviours. Home modifications and equipment recommendations are provided to increase safety and maximise independence.

Speech therapists prescribe diet and fluid modifications to minimise the risks of aspiration (entry of food into the airway). They also provide strategies for safe feeding and ways to manage behavioural feeding difficulties.

Physiotherapists aid in optimizing the individual's mobility through strength and balance retraining. They also help to prescribe relevant mobility aids to ensure that these individuals with dementia are able to move around safely without an increased risk of falls.

The therapists also provide caregiver training where required to empower and equip the caregiver with skills and knowledge to care and communicate with individuals suffering from dementia.

Useful websites

[What is Dementia](#)

[Understanding Dementia](#)

[Knowing Dementia](#)