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Caregiving for an Individual with Dementia: Beginning the Journey

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Getting the Diagnosis

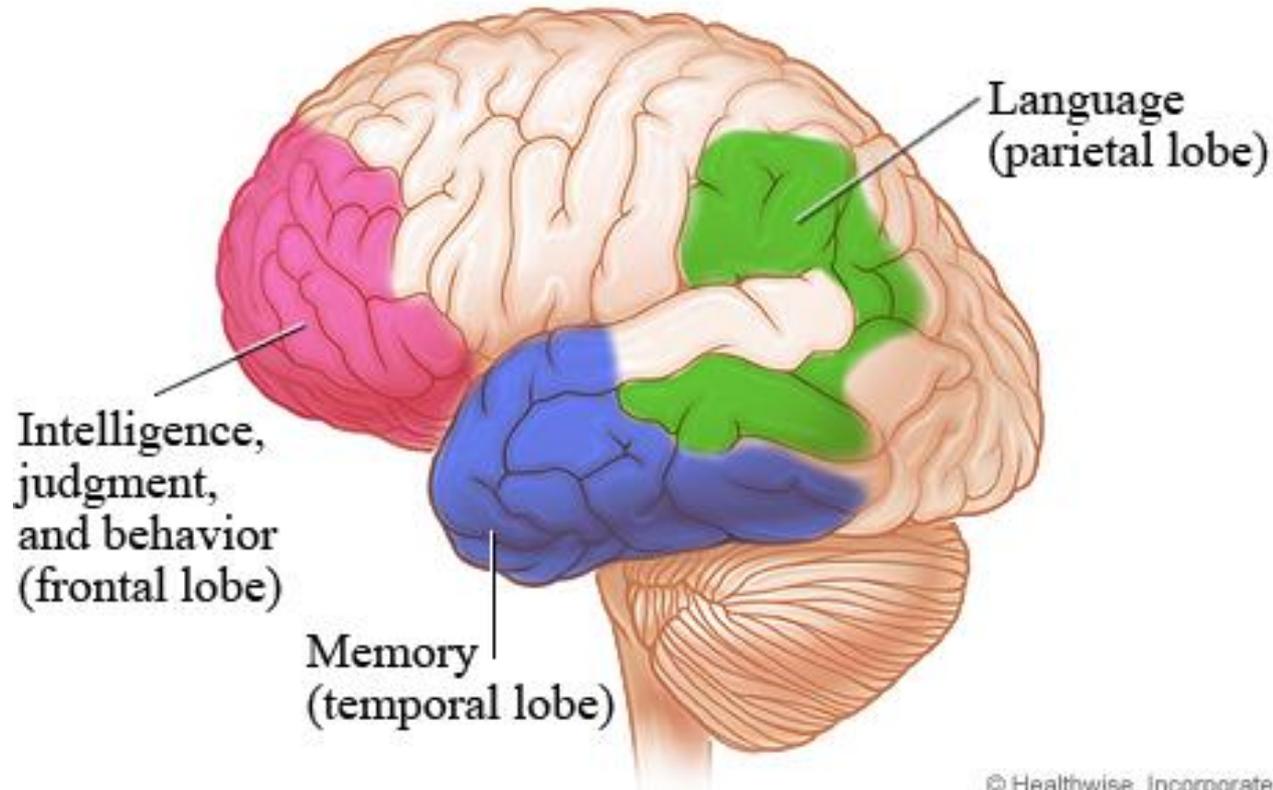
- Physician Assessment
- Cognitive Assessment
- Ruling Out Other Causes of Memory Problems
- Imaging

Staging of Early Dementia (CDR)

	NONE	QUESTIONABLE	MILD
MEMORY	No loss or slight loss	Consistent “benign” forgetfulness	Moderate short-term memory loss interfering with everyday activities
ORIENTATION	Fully oriented	Fully oriented, except slight difficulty with time relationships	Moderate difficulty with time relationships; may have geographic disorientation
JUDGMENT / PROBLEM-SOLVING	Judgment as good as ever	Slight problem-solving impairment	Moderate difficulty in handling problems; social judgment usually maintained
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS	Independent at usual level	Slightly impaired	Unable to function independently; appears normal to casual inspection
HOME AND HOBBIES	Well maintained	Slightly impaired	Mild impairment of function at home; more difficult chores / hobbies abandoned
PERSONAL CARE	Fully capable	Fully capable	Needs prompting

- Assess areas of deficit and severity to determine which brain areas might be affected
- Duration: 4 to 8 hours
- Diagnostic Clinical Interview
- One-on-one session with technician
- Paper-and-pencil and Computerized Tests
- Results compared to same-age / education peers
- Changes can be tracked objectively over time

Brain Changes in Alzheimer's



- Test Multiple Domains
 - Verbal and Visual Memory
 - Working Memory / Multitasking
 - Attention/Concentration
 - Problem-Solving
 - Motor Skills
 - Speech/Language
 - Processing Speed
 - Intellectual Functioning
 - Mood

- Comprehensive Report of Results
- Feedback Appointment
- Diagnostic Considerations
- Recommendations

Impact of the Diagnosis: Emotional Adjustment

- Stages of Grief
 - Denial
 - Anger
 - Bargaining
 - Depression
 - Acceptance
- Relief at having an explanation for symptoms
- Worry and fear about the future
- Embarrassment about cognitive errors
- Irritability and Frustration Regarding Deficits

Impact of the Diagnosis: Practical Adjustment

- Work / Hobbies
- Driving
- Living Alone
- Financial Management
- Other Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL)

What You Can Do to Cope

- Keep up with activities – don't isolate
- Find new activities which are appropriate to the individual's cognitive capabilities
 - Reminiscing
 - Socialization usually well-preserved
- Establish a routine
- Put together a “Memory Station” in your home
- Enjoyable activities – find ways to laugh
- Remember memory problems are not your fault
- Remember you are the same person

What You Can Do to Cope

- Prioritize
- Identify tasks which have become more difficult and which are more effortless
- Take breaks
- One task at a time
- Identify triggers for stress and make a plan
- Maintain **STRESS RESILIENCE**
 - Physical (Nutrition, Exercise, etc)
 - Emotional
 - Spiritual

Talking About Dementia

- Telling friends and family
 - You set the tone
 - You can “demystify” dementia for others
 - A chronic illness like many others
 - Be specific about how they can help
 - You can decide who to tell

- Assembling a Care Partner Team
- Advocacy for the Individual with Dementia
- Active use of community resources
 - Pennington
 - Alzheimer's Services of the Capitol Area
- Taking advantage of the Internet
- Books and workbooks

- In the early stages of dementia, can remain much the same
- In later stages, the individual with dementia will require more assistance
- Challenges to spousal relationship
- Challenges to relationship with adult children

Sadness vs. Depression

- Adjustment to changing roles
- Mild depression is common when insight into deficits is still high
- Moderate depression or suicidal thoughts may require more intensive intervention
- The role of antidepressants in managing symptoms
- Pros and cons of anxiety medications
- Appropriateness of individual or group therapy

Depression Warning Signs

- Feeling worthless
- Sadness and/or crying on a regular basis
- Loss of interest in regular activities
- Dramatic changes in sleep/appetite
- Thoughts of death, dying, or suicide

- Transition from Mild to Moderate stage of dementia can herald more dramatic changes in:
 - Mood
 - Mood swings and agitation
 - Anxiety Symptoms / OCD
 - Personality
 - Motivation and Drive
 - Comfort level in social situations

- Talk openly about feelings as much as possible, while realizing limitation
- Speech, language, and comprehension may be impaired as a function of the disease
- Multiple modalities of communication

Final Thoughts

- The importance of support
- Find what works for your family and situation
- Think of this as a “new normal”
- Communication is key



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