

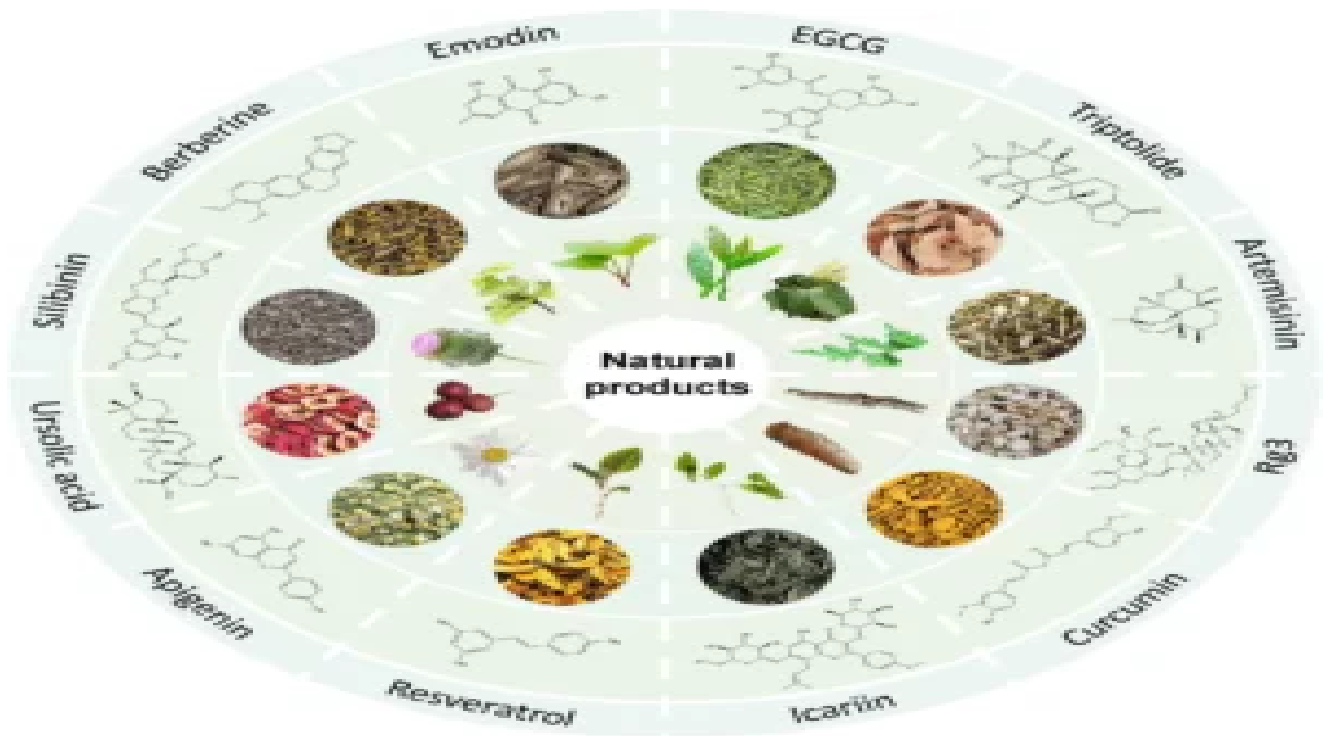
Dementia: causes, symptoms, solutions, foods and recipes

Clean PDF edition of the article from Supportive Food

By team2 · 6 March 2026 / 18 March 2026

Source page:

<https://supportivefood.com/dementia-causes-symptoms-solutions-foods-and-recipes/>



Article links: [Original article](#) | [Supportive Food home](#) | [Previous post](#) | [Next post](#)

Dementia isn't one specific disease; it's an umbrella term for a range of symptoms caused by physical changes in the brain.

While it's often linked to aging, it's not a normal part of growing older. It's like the difference between sometimes forgetting where you parked and forgetting you even have a car.

1. The “Umbrella” of Dementia

Dementia describes the loss of cognitive functioning—thinking, remembering, and reasoning—to such an extent that it interferes with a person’s daily life.

Common Types

Type	Primary Cause	Key Characteristics
Alzheimer’s Disease	Amyloid plaques & tau tangles	The most common form (60–80%). Primarily affects memory first.
Vascular Dementia	Impaired blood flow to the brain	Often follows a stroke; affects executive function and speed of thought.
Lewy Body Dementia	Protein deposits (alpha-synuclein)	Causes visual hallucinations, sleep disturbances, and motor issues.
Frontotemporal	Degeneration of frontal/temporal lobes	Often strikes younger adults (45–65); leads to marked personality changes.

2. Symptoms and Progression

Dementia is progressive, meaning it usually starts slow and worsens over time. It typically moves through three broad stages:

Early Stage (Mild)

- Forgetting recent conversations or events.
- Difficulty finding the right words (aphasia).
- Losing track of time or becoming “lost” in familiar places.

Middle Stage (Moderate)

- Significant memory loss, including forgetting personal history.
- Changes in behavior, such as wandering or repeated questioning.
- Needing help with personal care such as dressing or bathing.

Late Stage (Severe)

- Near-total dependence on caregivers.
- Loss of physical abilities, including walking or swallowing.
- Difficulty recognizing close family members.

3. What’s Happening in the Brain?

In many types of dementia, nerve cells stop functioning, lose links to other brain cells, and eventually die. While some neuron loss is a normal part of aging, dementia causes a much more severe decline. In Alzheimer's, for instance, the brain can shrink noticeably, and the hippocampus—the brain's “shipping and receiving” hub for new memories—is often the first area to be affected.

4. Diagnosis and Management

There is currently no cure for most progressive dementias, but management can significantly improve quality of life for both the individual and their caregivers.

- Medications: Cholinesterase inhibitors (such as Aricept) and NMDA receptor antagonists (such as Namenda) can help manage cognitive symptoms for a time.
- Therapies: Occupational therapy can help modify the home environment, and reminiscence therapy can boost mood through old photos and music.
- Lifestyle factors: Heart-healthy diets such as the MIND diet, regular exercise, and social engagement are the “big three” for slowing progression.

Note: Some “dementia-like” symptoms can be reversible. Vitamin B12 deficiency, thyroid problems, or severe dehydration can mimic dementia, so the article advises ruling these out with a blood test first.

1. The “Brain Guard”: Lifestyle & Risk Reduction

While genetics play a role, research suggests that up to 40% of dementia cases could be delayed or prevented by modifying certain life factors. Think of it as “brain proofing” your future.

Maintaining a connection with someone experiencing dementia—and protecting your own brain health—requires a mix of science-backed habits and a great deal of emotional intelligence.

The “Big Five” Interventions

Factor	Why it Matters	Actionable Step
Hearing Health	Hearing loss strains the brain and can intensify social isolation.	Get a hearing test and use hearing aids if needed.
The MIND Diet	Combines Mediterranean and DASH patterns to reduce inflammation.	Focus on leafy greens, berries, and nuts.
Social Fitness	Isolation harms the brain and well-being.	Join a club or schedule regular coffee dates.
Sleep Hygiene	Deep sleep helps the brain clear waste products such as amyloid.	Aim for 7–9 hours and treat sleep apnea.
Vascular Health	What is good for the heart is good for the brain.	Manage blood pressure and cholesterol.

2. The Art of Connection: Communication Tips

When short-term memory fades, emotional memory often remains intact. A person may not remember exactly what you said, but they may still remember how you made them feel.

DO: The “Golden Rules”

- Keep it simple: Use short sentences and one-step directions.
- Give it time: After asking a question, wait before repeating it. The article calls this the “20-second rule.”
- Eye level and touch: Approach from the front and use gentle touch when appropriate.
- Enter their reality: Instead of correcting a painful misremembered fact, invite conversation and validation.

DON'T: The “Common Pitfalls”

- Don't quiz them with prompts such as “Do you remember...?”
- Don't argue when their version of time or place is incorrect.
- Don't talk about them as if they are not present.

3. Creating a “Dementia-Friendly” Environment

Small physical changes in the home can reduce “sundowning” and lower the risk of falls.

- Contrast is king: Use a colored plate on a white tablecloth so food is easier to see.
- Remove busy patterns that may look confusing or threatening.
- Label cabinets and rooms with pictures or words.

Pro-tip: Music can act as a “backdoor” to the brain. A playlist of songs from a person’s youth may reduce agitation even when speech is limited.

1. The “Optimal Day”: A Sample Schedule

Building a daily structure is not just about staying busy; it reduces cognitive load, lowers anxiety, and supports the body clock with a more predictable rhythm.

Time	Phase	Activities	Goal
8:00 AM	Orientation	Open curtains for bright light, morning hygiene, breakfast.	Reset the body clock.
10:00 AM	Cognitive	Reading the news, sorting mail, or a creative hobby.	Use peak mental energy.

Time	Phase	Activities	Goal
12:00 PM	Social	Lunch together, light conversation, or a brief walk.	Nutrition and connection.
2:00 PM	Rest	Podcast listening or a short nap.	Prevent mental fatigue.
3:30 PM	Physical	Gardening, folding laundry, or chair exercises.	Burn off restless energy.
5:30 PM	Transition	Early dinner, closing blinds, dimming lights.	Prepare for sundowning.
7:30 PM	Sensory	Warm bath, soft music, or photo albums.	Calm the nervous system.

2. The “Sundowning” Survival Guide

“Sundowning” refers to the increased confusion, agitation, and anxiety that often appears in the late afternoon or evening.

Why It Happens

- Fatigue after a full day of interpreting confusing signals.
- Low-angled evening shadows that create visual illusions.
- Unmet needs such as hunger, thirst, or needing the bathroom without being able to explain it clearly.

Strategies to Lower the Temperature

1. The “Light Bridge”: Turn on bright indoor lights before the room gets dim so shadows do not become frightening.
2. The “20-Minute Pre-Emptive Snack”: A small high-protein snack before the usual difficult period may help.
3. The redirection box: Keep familiar tactile items nearby and invite the person to sort or handle them.
4. Validation, not correction: Acknowledge the feeling first rather than trying to win a factual argument.

3. Caregiver Compassion: “The Oxygen Mask”

Dementia care is a marathon, and caregiver burnout is real.

- The 10-minute escape: If frustration peaks, make sure the person is safe and step away briefly to reset yourself.
- Accept the “new normal”: Care often becomes an act of loving the person they are today while grieving what has changed.

Final thought: In dementia care, perfection is the enemy of connection. The goal is a “good day,” not a “perfect day.”