Dementia

Dementia is an overall term for diseases and conditions characterized by a decline in memory, language, problem-solving and other cognitive skills that affect a person's ability to perform everyday activities. This decline occurs because nerve cells (neurons) in parts of the brain involved in cognitive function have been damaged and no longer function normally. Alzheimer's is the most common type of dementia, accounting for 60 to 80 percent of cases. Vascular dementia, which occurs because of microscopic bleeding and blood vessel blockage in the brain, is the second most common type of dementia.

Other types and causes of dementia:

- Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease
- Mixed dementia
- Frontotemporal dementia
- Lewy body dementia/Dementia with Lewy bodies
- Normal-pressure hydrocephalus
- Parkinson’s disease
- Pick’s disease
- Progressive supranuclear palsy

Individuals with Down syndrome, Huntington’s disease and Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome are at risk for developing dementia symptoms.

Symptoms of dementia can vary greatly. Examples include problems with short-term memory, keeping track of a purse or wallet, paying bills, planning and preparing meals, remembering appointments and traveling out of the neighborhood.

In some cases, individuals do not have dementia but instead have a condition with symptoms that mimic those of dementia. Common causes of dementia-like symptoms are depression, delirium, side effects from medications, thyroid problems, certain vitamin deficiencies and excessive use of alcohol. Unlike dementia, these conditions may often be reversed with treatment.

A physician can help identify the specific cause of dementia and provide appropriate care.