



About dementia | Mō te mate wareware

Information sheet

If you are concerned that you or someone you know may have dementia mate wareware, take action by seeing your health care professional for a full assessment. For support and more information contact your local Alzheimers or Dementia organisation, call 0800 004 001 or visit www.alzheimers.org.nz.

What is dementia? | He aha te mate wareware?

Dementia is a term used to describe a group of symptoms caused by changes in how well our brains work. Alzheimers disease is the most common form of dementia. Dementia can affect anyone, and as people get older the chances of developing dementia increase. The symptoms each person experiences depends on the parts of the brain that are affected. However, the most common dementia symptoms include changes in memory, thinking, behaviour, personality and emotions. These changes affect a person's ability to perform everyday tasks and may interfere with their everyday lives. Dementia is progressive, which means that for most people the changes gradually spread through the brain and lead to the symptoms getting worse. Dementia is different for everyone – what they experience, and how quickly they are affected.

Early symptoms | Ngā tohunā tōmua

The early signs and symptoms of dementia can be subtle and hard to recognise. Many conditions, such as stroke, depression and infections, as well as normal ageing, can cause dementia-like symptoms. It's important not to assume changes are due to dementia. It's also very important to see a doctor if concerned as symptoms may be caused by a treatable condition. If symptoms are caused by dementia, an early diagnosis means you or the person you are concerned about, and their whānau have early access to support, information, and any appropriate medication. There is also time to plan for the future.

Forms of dementia | Ngā āhua o te mate wareware

There are many different diseases that cause dementia and, for most people, there's no known reason why they develop. Some of the most common forms of dementia are:

- **Alzheimers Disease |Te Mate Alzheimers**

This is the most common form of dementia - around two-thirds of people with dementia have Alzheimers disease. Although we are still learning about the causes, there are typical changes seen in the brain - shrinkage and a build up of abnormal proteins (plaques and tangles).

- **Vascular Dementia |Te Mate Wareware Ā-iaia Toto**

This is the second most common form of dementia. This group of conditions is caused by poor blood supply to the brain as a result of a stroke or several mini-strokes, or by blood vessel disease in the brain. Symptoms can be sudden after a stroke or gradual as disease in the blood vessels worsen. People can have a combination of vascular dementia and Alzheimers disease.

- **Lewy Body Disease |Mate Lewy Bodies**

This disease is characterised by the presence of 'Lewy Bodies', abnormal clumps of protein in the brain. These cause changes in movement, thinking, behaviour and alertness. There can be fluctuations between almost normal functioning and severe confusion within short periods, and may also have hallucinations, seeing things that aren't really there.

- **Frontotemporal Dementia |Mate Wareware Whakamua-Rahirahinga**

Fronto-temporal dementia is a group of conditions which affect the frontal and/or temporal lobes of the brain. Frontal lobe involvement affects motivation, planning and organising, controlling emotions and maintaining socially appropriate behaviour. Temporal lobes involvement affects speaking and/or understanding language. Symptoms often begin in a person's 50s or 60s.

Family links with dementia | Ngā hononga whānau ki te mate wareware

Some forms of dementia can have whānau links, which means some forms of dementia may be inheritable. About a third of people with Alzheimers disease have a close relative (parent, brother or sister) who has, or has had, this disease. This does not necessarily mean dementia is inherited in your case, and for many people there's no whānau history. If you have any concerns about a family history of dementia, please see your health care professional. Remember, there are many other treatable reasons for memory lapses, confusion and forgetfulness.

Memory lapses versus memory loss | Te makere hinengaro ki te ngaronga mahara

It is important to understand what is dementia and what isn't. We all forget things from time to time and often complain our memory isn't what it used to be, but this doesn't necessarily mean we're getting dementia.

The booklet [About Dementia: A guide for people diagnosed with dementia](#) provides information on:

- what dementia is
- the early warning signs and diagnosis
- brain health and risk reduction
- what support is available and
- future planning

See www.alzheimers.org.nz/information-and-support/information/booklets-and-fact-sheets for more information.

This information sheet provides a general summary only of the subject matter covered and is not a substitute for informed professional advice. Any person with dementia or their care partner or whānau should seek professional advice about their individual situation. Alzheimers NZ is not liable for any error or omission in this publication, as a result of negligence or otherwise. This information sheet was updated in January 2026.