

RISE TOGETHER

A QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER



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What's the Difference Between Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia?

Understanding one of the most common misconceptions about cognitive change.

"My mom has Alzheimer's and dementia."

It's one of the most common statements heard from families. It's also one of the most common misconceptions, one that reflects just how much confusion still exists about the relationship between Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

So, what's the difference?

The truth is, Alzheimer's disease and dementia are not the same thing, even though the terms are often used interchangeably. Understanding the difference can help families better understand a diagnosis, ask more informed questions, and feel more confident as they navigate the journey ahead.

Dementia is an umbrella term.

Think of dementia as a broad category rather than a specific disease.

Dementia describes a group of symptoms caused by changes in the brain that can affect memory, thinking, reasoning, language, judgment, personality, and the ability to carry out everyday activities. These changes are significant enough to interfere with a person's daily life and independence.

Just as "heart disease" describes many different conditions affecting the heart, dementia describes many different conditions affecting the brain.



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Alzheimer's disease is one cause of dementia.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia, accounting for approximately 60 to 80 percent of cases. It is a progressive disease that gradually damages brain cells over time.

But Alzheimer's isn't the only cause of dementia.

Other common causes include vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, frontotemporal dementia, and mixed dementia, where more than one disease process affects the brain.

Each type can affect people differently, which is one reason no two dementia journeys are exactly alike.

So why do people say, "Alzheimer's and dementia?"

It's understandable why the terms are often used interchangeably.

A simple way to think about it is this:

If someone says they have a Labrador and a dog, you naturally understand that a Labrador is a type of dog.

In the same way, Alzheimer's disease is one cause of dementia.

There are situations where a person may have Alzheimer's disease along with another brain disease, such as vascular disease. This is known as mixed dementia. But when someone has Alzheimer's disease alone, saying they have "Alzheimer's and dementia" is simply using both the specific diagnosis and the broader term that describes its effects.

Did You Know?

A person can have more than one disease affecting the brain at the same time. When Alzheimer's disease occurs along with another condition, such as vascular disease, it's called mixed dementia.



Why does this matter?

Because words shape our understanding—and our understanding shapes how we respond.

When families understand the diagnosis, conversations with physicians become clearer. Educational resources become easier to understand. Most importantly, it helps families recognize that while a diagnosis provides valuable information, it does not define the person.

Every individual living with dementia has unique strengths, abilities, preferences, relationships, and life experiences. Two people with the same diagnosis may experience the disease very differently.

That's why person-centered care remains the foundation of good dementia care. We don't just care for a diagnosis. We care for a person.

"A diagnosis helps explain changes in the brain. It never tells the whole story about the person."

— *Maureen Braen*

Understanding the difference between Alzheimer's disease and dementia won't change a diagnosis, but it can change how we respond to it.

Knowledge helps replace confusion with clarity. It gives families the confidence to ask better questions, seek appropriate resources, and better understand what their loved one may be experiencing.

Most importantly, it reminds us that while a diagnosis helps explain changes in the brain, it never tells the whole story. Every person living with dementia has a lifetime of experiences, relationships, abilities, and purpose that deserve to be recognized and honored.

When we understand what's happening in the brain, we're better able to respond with patience, compassion, and connection. And sometimes, those simple moments of understanding make all the difference.

Looking for support? Reach out. Let's navigate this together.

A NOTE FROM MAUREEN

As summer unfolds, I'm reminded that understanding is one of the greatest gifts we can offer one another. Every conversation, every question, and every opportunity to learn helps build a community where people living with dementia and their care partners feel seen, supported, and less alone.

Thank you for allowing RISE Dementia Care to be part of your journey. Whether through educational programs, support groups, speaking engagements, or simply sharing resources, my hope is that each connection brings greater confidence, compassion, and hope.

Together, we rise with understanding.

WHAT'S NEW AT RISE DEMENTIA CARE

THE KALEIDOSCOPE CORNER

Connection continues to grow at **The Kaleidoscope Dementia Resource Center**.

Our monthly **Speaker Series** continues to bring families, professionals, and community members together for education, conversation, and support.

Our **Connection Café** offers a unique shared model where people living with dementia engage in meaningful activities with volunteers while their care partners gather for education and support.

We're also excited to continue **Living Well as Life's Patterns Change**, a small-group gathering exclusively for individuals living with mild cognitive impairment or early-stage dementia.

Upcoming programs, event dates, and registration are available at: www.kaleidoscopedrc.org

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UPCOMING EVENT

Summer Education Series

The Alzheimer's Spouse

Hosted by Arden Courts
of Wayne, New Jersey
Thursday, July 30 | 5:00–6:00 p.m.

Join us for this free community presentation exploring how dementia changes a relationship and how spouses can continue to foster connection, communication, and understanding throughout the caregiving journey.

Whether you're a spouse, family member, or care partner, you'll leave with practical communication strategies and a deeper understanding of how to maintain connection as the relationship changes.

To register or learn more:
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