



# CONFUSION

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE MEMORY LOSS  
DEMENTIA

## PROMOTING BRAIN HEALTH:

*Be a Champion! Make a Difference Today!*

MEMORY LOSS DEMENTIA  
ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE CONFUSION

Brain health, or cognitive health, refers to skills such as remembering, learning new things, planning, concentrating, or making decisions. When cognitive health is impaired (referred to as cognitive impairment), a person has trouble with these skills that affect the things he or she can do in everyday life. People of all ages can experience cognitive impairment, which can range from mild to severe. A person with mild cognitive impairment may be aware of increased difficulty remembering, but it may not be obvious to others. Most likely, these individuals can still do their everyday activities. Individuals with more severe cognitive impairment usually have difficulty expressing themselves and understanding others. They may be unable to complete tasks such as preparing meals or managing finances. They may require help to manage their medicines and medical conditions. Ultimately, individuals may become unable to care for themselves, lose their independence, and require institutional care.

More than 16 million adults aged 18 years and older in the United States are living with cognitive impairment.

Most adults in the United States live vital and productive lives, but an estimated 16 million are living with some form of cognitive impairment. Some are younger adults who may have cognitive impairment as a result of a head injury, as from a car crash or a fall. Most people with cognitive impairment are older adults, and they are the primary focus of this factsheet. Cognitive impairment is not an inevitable part of aging, although age is the greatest risk factor. As the baby boomers turn 65 over the next two decades, the number of people living with cognitive impairment will likely double.

### YOU CAN BE A CHAMPION

Individuals and communities need to prepare to meet the challenges associated with cognitive impairment. You can help make a difference by becoming a community champion. Community champions, like you, are needed to help promote brain health in your community. Tips included in this factsheet provide valuable information about brain health and cognitive impairment. It also includes actions you can take to become a community champion and help make a difference.

### ESSENTIALS OF BRAIN HEALTH

To protect your brain health, research suggests it is essential to

- Be physically active.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Keep your mind active (e.g., learn new things, be engaged socially).

- Maintain good heart health (e.g., quit smoking, decrease cholesterol levels, reduce sodium (salt) intake, and decrease alcohol consumption).
- Protect your head from injuries (e.g., wear a helmet when riding your bike, buckle your seat belt, remove objects that could lead to a fall in or around your home).

### KNOW THE SIGNS

You can take action if you know the signs of cognitive impairment. Some causes of cognitive impairment are treatable, so it is important that individuals showing possible signs of cognitive impairment be evaluated by a health care provider for appropriate care and treatment.

Percent of adults with perceived cognitive impairment, by selected state, 2009.

	Adults Aged 18-49 Years with Perceived Cognitive Impairment	Adults Aged 50 Years or Older with Perceived Cognitive Impairment
California (n=7,327)	7.8%	11.4%
Florida (n=7,371)	6.0%	11.4%
Iowa (n=4,181)	3.8%	9.2%
Louisiana (n=6,263)	4.5%	9.3%
Michigan (n=2,477)	7.7%	14.9%

*Note: Cognitive impairment (CI) is defined as "confusion or memory loss that is happening more often or is getting worse during the past 12 months." Data refer to the respondent's perception of cognitive impairment and not any specific diagnosis. These data refer to the civilian, noninstitutionalized population.*  
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, BRFSS, 2009

Some common signs of cognitive impairment include

- Memory loss.
- Frequently asking the same question or repeating the same story over and over.
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks.
- Trouble coming up with the right words to name objects.
- Frequently forgetting events and appointments.
- Not recognizing familiar people and places.
- Having trouble exercising judgment, such as knowing what to do in an emergency.

### UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS

Understanding the risks for cognitive impairment is essential for brain health. Depending on the type of impairment, if people showing signs of cognitive impairment are identified earlier, interventions can occur earlier that may prevent continuing damage to the brain. Besides age, other risk factors include family history, heredity, education level, head injury, exposure to pesticides or toxins, physical inactivity, and chronic health conditions such as heart disease and stroke, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

### TREATABLE CAUSES

Currently, there is no cure for cognitive impairment caused by Alzheimer's disease or other related dementias. Some other types of cognitive impairment may be treatable, such as those due to medication side effects, vitamin B12 deficiency, and depression. These issues may be effectively addressed with appropriate medical treatment.

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR FAMILIES

Cognitive impairment impacts not only the lives of individuals living with the condition, but families and communities as well. As a community champion, you can help make a positive difference. People with cognitive impairment are often affected by other chronic diseases or conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Managing and treating multiple chronic conditions can be complicated. Individuals with cognitive impairment need to have an organized and clear plan of care with their family members and friends, who are often their caregivers. You can increase awareness about managing chronic health conditions and cognitive impairment at the same time, or increase awareness about resources available to family caregivers of a person with cognitive impairment.

The choice to care for a loved one with cognitive impairment can be difficult, but caregivers describe experiencing great reward and satisfaction in what they do for their family members. The responsibility of taking care of someone with cognitive impairment can also impact the caregiver's own health. More communities and businesses are recognizing the rewards and hardships



endured by caregivers and are providing support services of many kinds.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO CREATE AWARENESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Champions, like you, are needed to help promote brain health in your community. Consider taking the following actions:

- Promote greater knowledge and awareness of strategies to promote cognitive health with your family and friends, and other members of the community.
- Encourage other community leaders to promote cognitive health.
- Talk with community leaders to discover opportunities for resource sharing and collaboration to strengthen support for individuals with cognitive impairment and their caregivers.
- Build a coalition to assess your community's strengths and needs related to brain health and cognitive impairment.
- Educate others on the signs of mild cognitive impairment that might affect self-care or management of chronic diseases (such as, diabetes, heart diseases).
- Encourage people you know who care for someone with cognitive impairment to get information about the condition and to seek services and supports early.

### MORE RESOURCES

#### Caregiving

AARP: [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

Administration on Aging: [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)

Alzheimer's Association: [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

Family Caregiver Alliance: [www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org)

National Alliance for Caregiving: [www.caregiving.org](http://www.caregiving.org)

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging: [www.n4a.org](http://www.n4a.org)

National Family Caregivers Association: [www.thefamilycaregiver.org](http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org)

Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving: [www.rosalynncarter.org](http://www.rosalynncarter.org)

#### Cognitive Health & Cognitive Impairment

Alzheimer's Association: [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/aging](http://www.cdc.gov/aging)

National Institute on Aging: [www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov)

*This report is available at [www.cdc.gov/aging/healthybrain/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/aging/healthybrain/index.htm)*