

# CottageHouseCall

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## ***Which is it: Forgetfulness, Dementia or Alzheimer's?***

**By: Joseph Maslak, M.D., F.A.C.P.**

Did you forget where the car is parked? Did you misplace a set of keys? Did you miss an appointment you've had scheduled for weeks? Forgetfulness is often associated with Alzheimer's Disease but researchers say it is not always an indicator of the disease, which causes gradual deterioration of a person's memory. So, how much forgetfulness is cause for concern?

Because many people experience memory lapses, researchers at the Alzheimer's Association had a nationwide campaign focused on the differences between typical age-related memory loss and more serious conditions such as dementia and Alzheimer's. Typical signs of memory loss from aging include:

- Loss of ability to recall past events;
- Frequent distraction;
- Not remembering names of people; or
- Preoccupation.

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**Joseph Maslak, M.D., F.A.C.P.**  
**Member of Medical Staff at Galesburg Cottage Hospital**  
**834 N. Seminary Street, Suite 301**  
**Galesburg, IL 61401**  
**Board Certified in Internal Medicine**  
**Fellow of the American College of Physicians**  
**(309) 342-9183**

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The term dementia describes a group of symptoms caused by changes in the brain's function. The probability of suffering from dementia increases with age. Dementia predominantly occurs in the second half of our lifetime, often after the age of 65. Symptoms may include:

- Asking the same questions repeatedly;
- Becoming lost in familiar places;
- Being unable to follow directions;
- Getting disoriented about time and places; or
- Neglecting personal safety, hygiene and nutrition.

Sometimes older people may suffer from emotional issues that can be mistaken for dementia. Feeling sad, lonely, worried or bored may be more common for people who have lost a loved one or friend or who may be facing retirement. Adapting to these difficult changes may leave some people feeling confused or forgetful. Typically, emotional problems can be eased by a supportive group of friends and family, or by professional help from a physician or counselor.

The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's Disease, a progressive brain disorder that gradually destroys a person's memory and ability to learn, reason, make judgments, communicate and carry out daily activities. As the disease progresses, a person may also experience changes in personality and behavior, such as anxiety, agitation or even delusions.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, more than 5 million people are affected by this disease and researchers are discovering more factors, such as genetics and lifestyle, that may affect a person's likelihood of developing the condition. Recent studies suggest that individuals who control their blood pressure, weight and cholesterol levels, exercise and stay socially active are less likely to develop Alzheimer's.

Because it can be difficult to recognize the differences in forgetfulness, dementia and Alzheimer's Disease, consulting your physician may be the best option. A physician can recommend treatment options or counseling if necessary.

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