Dr. Rob’s Science Connection -- Enhancing Brain Health

## What Is the Difference Between Dementia and Alzheimer’s disease

## Issue 4

I am frequently asked the question “What is the difference between Dementia and Alzheimer’s Disease?” The answer is quite simple: Alzheimer’s disease is simply a *type* of dementia, actually the most common type of dementia. There are many different types of dementia but the majority of cases are probably of the Alzheimer’s type. As you probably know, dementia is a term used to describe memory and cognitive impairment that is severe enough to negatively affect quality of life.

The second most common cause of dementia is vascular dementia, which is caused by a stroke. Other types of dementia include, but are not limited to: Dementia with Lewy Bodies, Frontotemporal Dementias (e.g., Pick’s Disease), Parkinson’s Related Dementia, HIV Related Dementia, Normal Pressure Hydrocephalus, and Wernicke-Korsakoff Dementia. It appears that each type of dementia is associated with a slightly different set of symptoms. Experienced geriatric professionals can get quite good at differentiating the type of dementia, but unfortunately in many areas there is a shortage of such professionals.

While we still have not found a cure for dementia there are many lifestyle behaviors, which seem to be associated with a significant reduction in the likelihood of developing symptoms of dementia. These are buffering factors or things that are associated with reduced likelihood of developing dementia.

Aerobic exercise

Physical Exercise

Cognitive Exercise

Eating more fish or taking fish oil supplements

Maintaining a healthy weight

Avoiding diabetes

Being social engaged

While most types of dementia are not currently reversible, there is a condition that looks like dementia but it is not and that is known as *delirium*. Common causes of delirium include infection (urinary tract infections are a common cause in hospital and skilled nursing facilities), dehydration, and pharmacological side effects. If you notice a fairly rapid change in cognition (e.g., inability to focus attention, wandering or incomprehensible language, difficult understanding speech, changes in sleep patterns), it is important to get the person evaluated by a medical professional.

Anyone concerned about possible dementia should talk with their doctor. But a great place to get more information about dementia is the Alzheimer’s Association. Visit their website at [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org) or try contacting a regional chapter of the association.

Dr. Rob Winningham is a Professor of Psychology and Gerontology at Western Oregon University. For the past 20 years he has researched human memory and ways to enhance cognitive abilities. His brain stimulation activities are used by thousands of retirement communities and have been shown to improve memory ability. For more information go to: [www.robwinningham.com](http://www.robwinningham.com)

*These articles are written for community members to educate them about brain health. The articles can be used in cognitive stimulation classes or in community newsletters. Anyone can use these articles, without requesting permission, as long as Dr. Rob Winningham is given credit. The articles can be reformatted but the text cannot be edited.*