

Busting Dementia Myths

What have you heard about dementia? Do you work with older adults?

MYTH 1: Any change in thinking ability could be dementia.

- Certain slight declines are *normal* with age – in mental speed, and effortful memory retrieval (that specific name!).
- Dementia warning signs can be: frequently repeating yourself; having difficulty doing things you used to do (e.g., using a computer).

MYTH 2: Only the elderly get dementia.

- Dementia can occur in younger people as a result of brain trauma, stroke, substances, infection, and diseases like MS or Parkinson's.
- Alzheimer's is the most common cause; vascular disease (due to damage to blood vessels that provide blood to brain regions) is the second leading cause.

MYTH 3: As we age, at some point we get dementia. It can't be prevented.

- Healthy aging has mental & emotional benefits – and does not involve dementia!
- Regular exercise, and cognitive & social activities, help maintain our thinking skills as we age.

MYTH 4: Cognitive screening tests can always diagnose dementia.

- Low scores could indicate dementia, but other reasons for poor scores must also be considered (e.g., low formal education; language barriers).
- Neuropsychological evaluation is more comprehensive, and better able to diagnose the extent and type of cognitive impairment. It can also confirm normal cognition for age.

What is a neuropsychologist?

A neuropsychologist is a clinical psychologist with extra training in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of brain-related syndromes.

What is dementia?

Dementia is major decline in cognitive skills, to the point of affecting daily functioning.