

MINDFUL MATTERS:

A Conversation Guide for
Faith Communities on
Alzheimer's Disease



About The Balm In Gilead

For more than 38 years, The Balm In Gilead, Inc. has worked to improve the health and wellness of Black communities across the African Diaspora. As a nationally recognized nonprofit organization, The Balm In Gilead builds and strengthens the capacity of faith-based institutions, public health organizations, and community partners to deliver culturally relevant, evidence-based health programs.

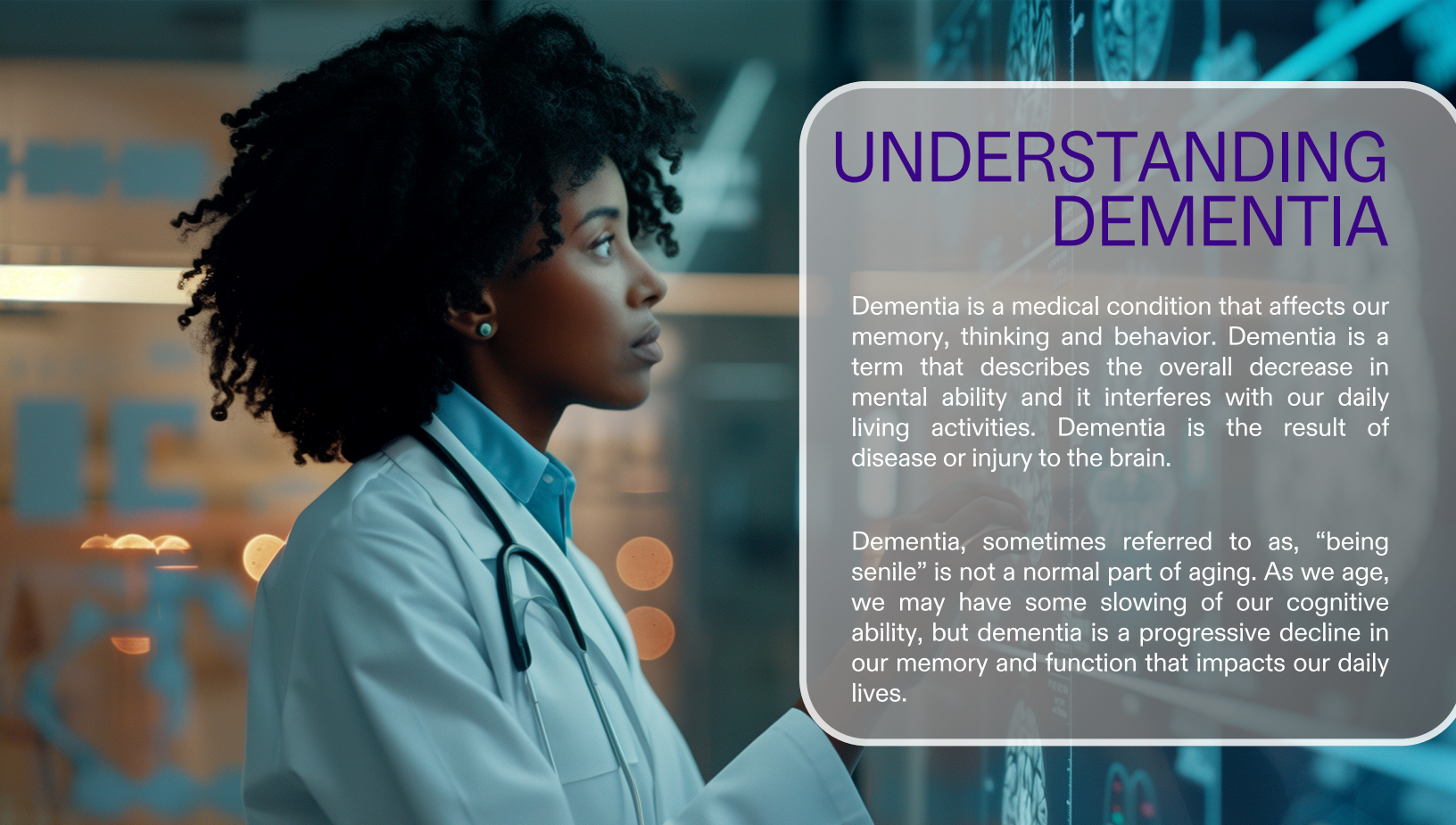
Through initiatives such as the National Brain Health Center for African Americans, The Balm In Gilead provides education, training, and outreach to help individuals and families understand Alzheimer's disease, reduce risk factors, and navigate caregiving. Our commitment is rooted in equity: more than 60% of African American families have been touched by dementia, and yet they remain underdiagnosed, under-supported, and underrepresented in clinical research.

Purpose

This conversation guide aims to provide faith communities and African American communities with culturally tailored education and information about Alzheimer's Disease, its impacts on African Americans, and the importance of clinical trials. Information this guide was created to support increased awareness and understanding of Alzheimer's disease among African American communities and congregations.

The Balm In Gilead, Inc. through its National Brain Health Center for African Americans delivers culturally responsive Alzheimer's disease education and clinical trials awareness through trusted faith-based and community networks. The Balm In Gilead has established deep community relationships, boasting a national congregational reach that supports the increased dissemination of accessible information on brain health, early detection and diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease, caregiver supports, treatment pathways, and the role of clinical research.

Together, with its partners, The Balm In Gilead aims to reduce disparities, build trust, and empower individuals and families to make informed decisions that advance more equitable Alzheimer's outcomes.

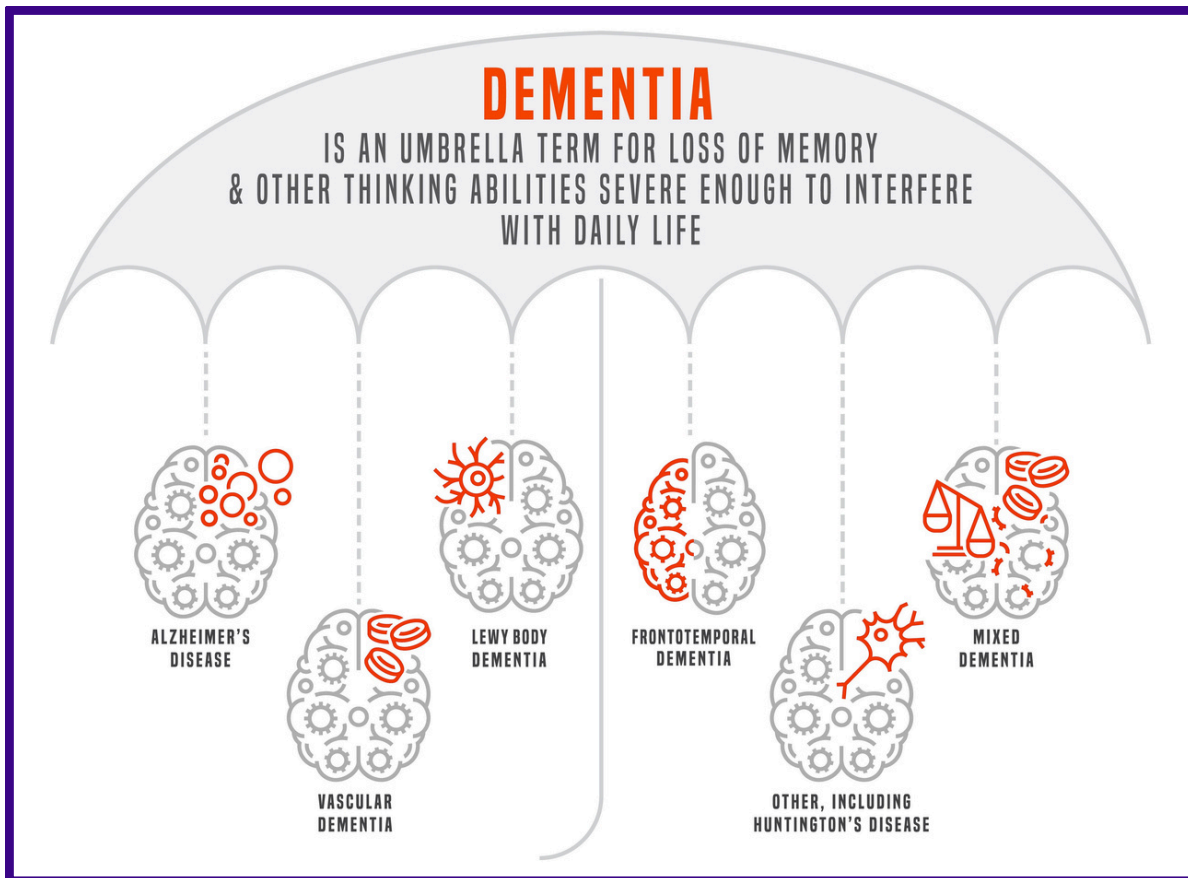


UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA

Dementia is a medical condition that affects our memory, thinking and behavior. Dementia is a term that describes the overall decrease in mental ability and it interferes with our daily living activities. Dementia is the result of disease or injury to the brain.

Dementia, sometimes referred to as, “being senile” is not a normal part of aging. As we age, we may have some slowing of our cognitive ability, but dementia is a progressive decline in our memory and function that impacts our daily lives.

The illustration below gives an example of the relationship between dementia and Alzheimer’s and other cognitive health problems



WHAT IS ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE?

Alzheimer's disease is the leading cause of dementia. The most striking symptom is memory loss, especially the loss of recently learned information. Other symptoms include a decline in the ability to learn, reason, make judgments, communicate and carry out daily activities.

As the disease progresses, the person may also experience personality changes, social disengagement and other behaviors, such as anxiety, suspiciousness or agitation. Even though the person may look fine, he or she may begin to have problems with his or her daily routine.

This chart illustrates normal memory loss as we age and examples of memory loss that could be a possible sign of dementia or Alzheimer's:

NORMAL MEMORY LOSS AS WE AGE		SIGNS OF ALZHEIMER'S
Occasionally making the wrong decision		Frequently showing poor judgment and decision making
Forgetting to pay a bill		Not being able to manage money and household finances
Not remembering what day it is, but remembering later		Not knowing the day, year or season
Trouble remembering the correct word to use sometimes		Not being able to hold a conversation intelligently
Losing car keys or other things everynow and then		Losing things and not being able to retrace your steps to find them

PROGRESSION OF ALZHEIMER'S

Alzheimer's is a progressive disease that leads to complete disruption of our brain functions and ultimately leads to death. It is important to identify this incurable disease in its early stages. Research suggests that the changes in the brain that lead to Alzheimer's begin many years before symptoms are seen. This includes what physicians and scientists have called 'preclinical' Alzheimer's disease. This can be followed by Mild Cognitive Impairment, when daily living skills remain generally unaffected but the first changes in thinking are seen. Once Alzheimer's disease is diagnosed, there are 3 general stages as follows:

EARLY STAGE MILD ALZHEIMER'S	MIDDLE STAGE MODERATE ALZHEIMER'S	LATE-STAGE SEVERE ALZHEIMER'S
<p>Most persons can still drive and live independently.</p> <p>Begin experiencing memory lapses (words, locations, familiar things).</p> <p>May withdraw socially and show apathy (often mistaken for depression).</p>	<p>Requires more care as memory and thinking decline.</p> <p>Lasts for many years.</p> <p>Behavioral changes appear (frustration, anger).</p> <p>Brain damage affects ability to express thoughts and perform tasks like driving and interacting socially.</p>	<p>Most difficult stage.</p> <p>Person can no longer function or communicate.</p> <p>Loses control over body movements.</p> <p>Needs 24/7 care for basic activities (bathing, eating).</p>

RECOGNIZING THE WARNING SIGNS

Alzheimer's disease advances at different rates for different people. The length of the illness can vary from 3 to 20 years. The areas of the brain that control memory and thinking skills are affected first, but as the disease progresses, cells die in other parts of the brain. Eventually, the person with Alzheimer's may require complete care. Alzheimer's disease shortens life. People with it are vulnerable to pneumonia, serious falls, infection and other related problems. As the health of a person with Alzheimer's disease begins to fail, Hospice services can be called for necessary support and important end of life care.

To help family and church members recognize the warning signs of Alzheimer's disease, the Alzheimer's Association has developed this list of the top ten most common things to look for:

SOME OF THE MOST COMMON SYMPTOMS:

Memory changes that disrupt daily life.

One of the most common signs of Alzheimer's, especially in the early stages, is forgetting recently learned information. Others include forgetting important dates or events; asking for the same information over and over; relying on memory aids (e.g., reminder notes or electronic devices) or family members for things they used to handle on their own.

What's normal with age?
Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.

Challenges in planning or solving problems.

Some people may experience changes in their ability to develop and follow a plan or work with numbers. They may have trouble following a familiar recipe or keeping track of monthly bills. They may have difficulty concentrating and take much longer to do things than they did before.

What's normal with age?
Making occasional errors when balancing a checkbook.

Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure.

People with Alzheimer's often find it hard to complete daily tasks. Sometimes, they may have trouble driving to a familiar location, managing a budget at work or remembering the rules of a favorite game.

What's normal with age?
Occasionally needing help to use the settings on a microwave or to record a television show.

Confusion with time or place.

People with Alzheimer's can lose track of dates, seasons and the passage of time. They may have trouble understanding something if it is not happening immediately. Sometimes they may forget where they are or how they got there.

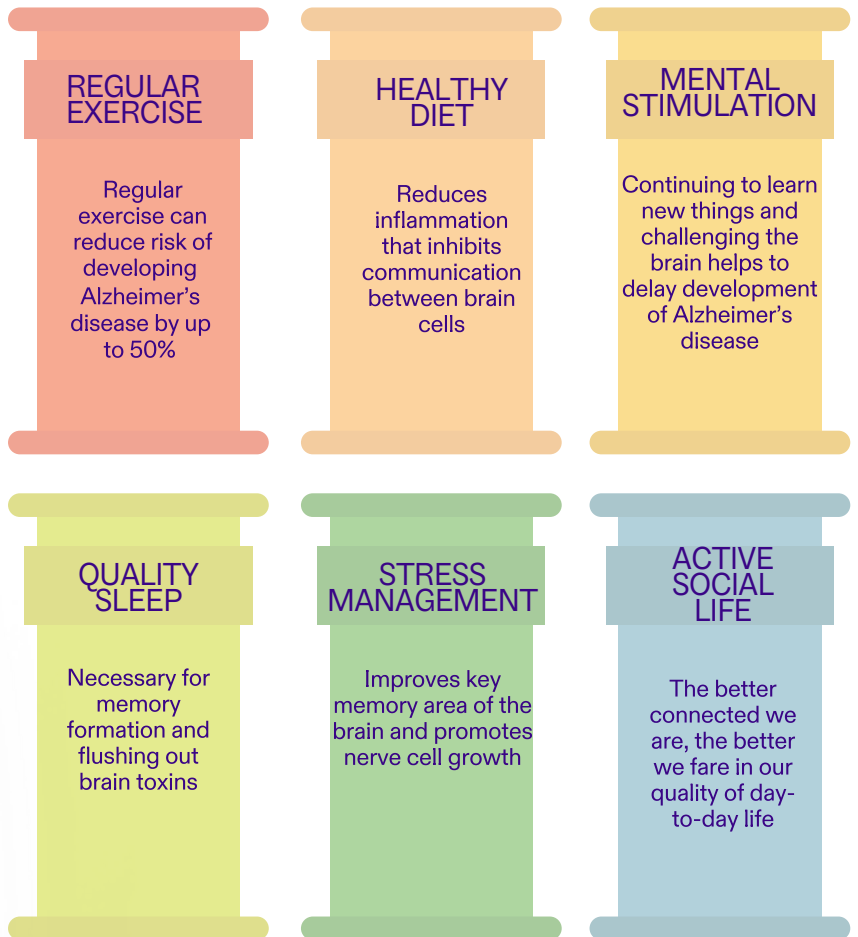
What's normal with age?
Getting confused about the day of the week but figuring it out later.



REDUCING THE RISK OF ALZHEIMER'S

As mentioned earlier, there is no cure for Alzheimer's, however there are things that can be done to reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's and support a healthy brain. The Balm In Gilead refers to these actions as the ...

“SIX PILLARS OF BRAIN HEALTH”





IMPORTANCE OF CLINICAL TRIALS

When families hear the words clinical trial, many people feel unsure, nervous, or even fearful. That reaction is understandable. For generations, medical research has not always treated communities of color fairly, and trust must be earned.

At the same time, nearly every treatment available today for Alzheimer's disease exists because people chose to participate in research. Without volunteers, there would be no new medicines, no better diagnostic tools, and no progress toward prevention.

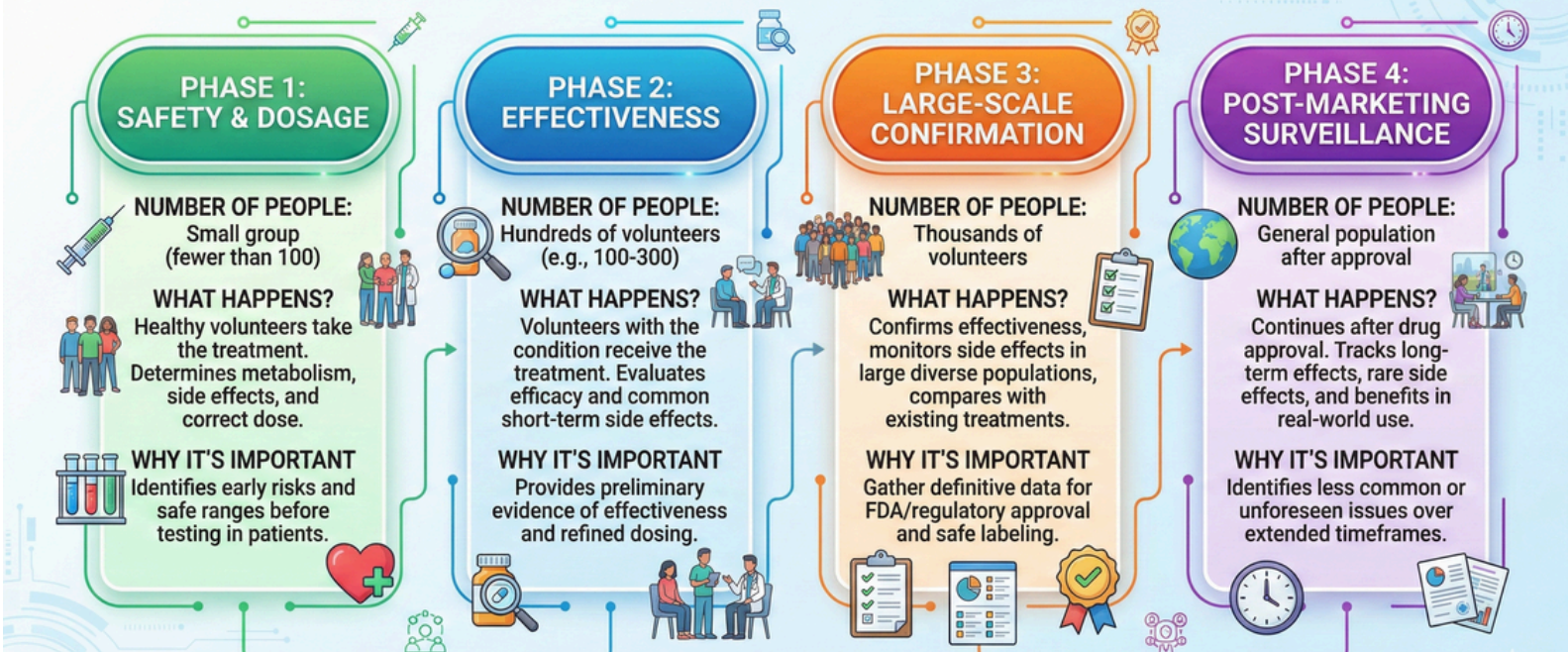
WHAT ARE CLINICAL TRIALS

A clinical trial is a carefully designed research study that tests new ways to prevent disease, detect disease earlier, treat disease, and improve quality of life. Clinical trials follow strict rules to protect participants. These rules are enforced by federal regulations and independent ethics and safety review boards.

Some trials involve treatment. Others only involve observation, memory testing, surveys, or imaging. Participation is always voluntary. You may ask questions, take time to decide, and leave a study at any point

Clinical trials give communities a voice in shaping the future of Alzheimer's care. They help ensure that new treatments are tested in people who look like us, live where we live, and have the health conditions common in our families. Participation is one way to move from being impacted by Alzheimer's to being part of the solution

THE FOUR PHASES OF A CLINICAL TRIAL





For more information about Alzheimer's clinical trials near you and to see if you qualify scan the QR code below



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