

# Frontotemporal Dementia

Information for patients and families

## What is frontotemporal dementia?

Frontotemporal dementia (FTD) or frontotemporal lobar degeneration (FTLD) is a disorder that affects certain parts of your brain. It leads to changes in your cognition (for example, thinking, understanding, speaking) and behavior. The frontal lobe of your brain controls your:

- motivation (interest in doing things)
- thinking
- planning
- language
- ability to do more than one thing at the same time

The frontal lobe is also responsible for your behaviour and personality. In this type of dementia, the frontal and temporal lobes of your brain are affected the most, so there is a significant change in behaviour and personality.

## What are the symptoms?

People with disease in the frontal lobe may develop:

- **apathy**  
This means they don't enjoy doing anything and don't feel like taking part in any activities. People with apathy may look and act depressed, but they don't have depression.
- **disinhibition**  
This means they have trouble stopping themselves from doing things that most others think are inappropriate. For example, they may say embarrassing things in public, not care about others' feelings, or do strange things.

When a person's problems are mostly related to their behaviour and personality, it's called behavioral **variant frontotemporal dementia**.



People with disease in the temporal lobe develop language problems. For example, they usually have trouble:

- understanding what others are saying
- knowing the meaning of a word or object
- reading and writing

Over time, both the frontal and temporal lobes are affected in someone who has FTLD. So, a person will eventually have both behaviour and language problems. A small number of people will develop muscle weakness and difficulty swallowing. Please see your doctor if this happens.

## **How is FTLD different from Alzheimer's disease?**

The behaviour and language problems happen much earlier in FTLD and are more serious than in Alzheimer's disease. People with FTLD are usually younger than people with Alzheimer's disease.

## **What causes FTLD?**

We don't know what causes FTLD. There are some proteins that build up in certain brain cells which lead to the death of these cells. Depending on where the cells die, you develop more language or more behavior symptoms. For now, an autopsy (examining the body after death) is the best way of knowing what has caused the disease.

## **Are there treatments?**

Right now, there is no cure for FTLD. Keeping active for as long as possible can help.

## **What about safety?**

Since FTLD affects your language and behavior, it can eventually become unsafe for a person with FTLD to:

- read (for example: medicine instructions, bills, legal papers)
- write (for example: cheques)
- live on their own
- cook
- drive

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