

## Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD)

### **What is FTD?**

Frontotemporal dementia is a neurodegenerative disease that typically results in atrophy (shrinkage) in two primary brain areas, namely the frontal and temporal lobes. These brain regions are heavily involved in personality, behavior, attention, and memory. FTD was initially given the name “Pick’s disease”, after Arnold Pick, a German physician that studied patients with this condition. Because there are multiple presentations of this illness, the name was later changed from Pick’s disease to Frontotemporal dementia.

### **What are the symptoms of FTD?**

Unlike Alzheimer’s disease, memory loss is typically not the first symptom of FTD. Instead, early symptoms often include changes in personality, social skills, concentration, multi-tasking, and reasoning. Because of the personality changes that often emerge early on with this condition, FTD is commonly confused with psychiatric disorders early in the disease process. As the disease progresses, people with FTD often become disinhibited and impulsive, often saying things and acting in ways that would typically go against their baseline personality. As other brain regions become involved with disease progression, related cognitive abilities deteriorate, resulting in worsening memory, language, and visual perception.

### **Who is affected by FTD?**

FTD occurs in about 1 in 5000 people and typically affects females more than males. This type of dementia typically occurs at a younger age than Alzheimer’s disease, usually emerging in the fifth and sixth decade of life. There does appear to be a genetic component to FTD, with close to 50% of all patients having some form of a family history of FTD. The genetic form of FTD has been localized to a change in a gene on chromosome 17. This gene makes a protein called tau, which is altered in FTD.

### **How is FTD diagnosed?**

Neuropsychological evaluation, neuroimaging, and clinical observation are the most effective means of diagnosing FTD. Information provided by the family is very useful in learning about the person's behaviors, and neuropsychological testing can typically distinguish the pattern of cognitive changes in FTD versus other dementing illnesses. Neuroimaging can reveal focal losses of brain tissue, as well as a reduction of activity in brain regions involved.

### **What treatment is available for FTD?**

Currently there is no cure for FTD. Medications used for Alzheimer's disease have not proven to be of significant benefit in controlling the symptoms of FTD, but there are multiple studies currently underway to try and identify treatments to provide symptom relief. For example, researchers are currently examining certain antidepressant medications called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) to see if these medications may provide some relief of the personality symptoms of FTD. Some research has supported that SSRIs were shown to decrease disinhibition, depression, carbohydrate craving, and compulsions in over half of the patients studied.

For further information, or if you would like to schedule an appointment with The Memory Center, please feel free to contact us at the address and phone number listed below.

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