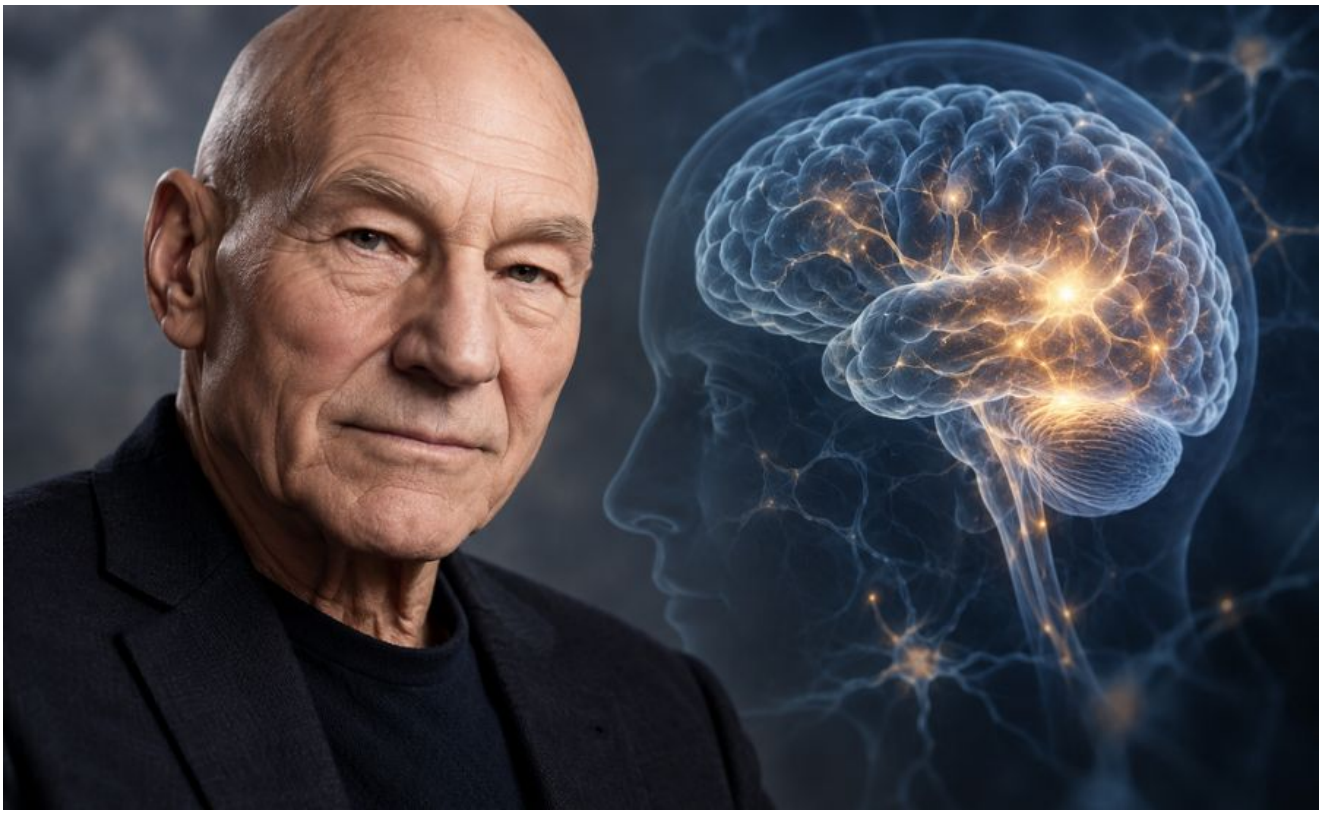
HOME

Patrick Stewart Dies at 86 After Battle With Two Devastating Brain Diseases — 10 Early Warning Signs You Should Never Ignore

By bestfolkmedicine · 30/10/2026 · 8 min read



The death of legendary British actor Sir Patrick Stewart has shocked fans around the world, bringing renewed attention to two serious neurological conditions that affect millions of people: Alzheimer's disease and Lewy body dementia.

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Stewart, best known for playing Captain Jean-Luc Picard in Star Trek: The Next Generation and Professor Charles Xavier in the X-Men film franchise, died on October 28, 2026, at his home in Los Angeles. He was 86 years old.

According to a statement from his longtime spokesperson, Stewart had experienced a period of illness involving Alzheimer's disease and Lewy body dementia. His wife, Sunny Ozell, was reportedly by his side.

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Although Stewart's specific symptoms and the timing of his diagnoses have not been publicly detailed, his death highlights an important health issue: some early warning signs of dementia may be mistaken for ordinary aging, stress, or fatigue.

Understanding these symptoms could help families recognize when professional medical evaluation is necessary.

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Two Brain Diseases That Can Affect Memory, Movement, and Behavior

Alzheimer's disease and Lewy body dementia are both progressive neurological conditions, but they affect the brain in different ways.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia worldwide. It is associated with abnormal changes in the brain, including the accumulation of amyloid-beta plaques and tau protein tangles, which contribute to nerve cell damage and cognitive decline.

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Lewy body dementia is associated with abnormal deposits of a protein called alpha-synuclein inside nerve cells. These deposits interfere with brain function and can affect attention, movement, sleep, perception, and behavior.

A person can have changes associated with both conditions, making symptoms and diagnosis more complicated.

While memory problems are frequently associated with Alzheimer's disease, Lewy body dementia may initially produce unusual sleep disturbances, visual hallucinations, changes in alertness, or

movement difficulties.

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10 Early Warning Signs of Dementia That Shouldn't Be Ignored

1. Forgetting Recent Conversations or Important Events

Occasionally forgetting where you placed your keys is common. However, repeatedly forgetting recently learned information, asking the same questions, or relying increasingly on others to remember everyday tasks may indicate cognitive changes.

Memory problems that interfere with daily life deserve medical attention.

2. Sudden Changes in Attention and Alertness

Some people with Lewy body dementia experience noticeable fluctuations in mental clarity.

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They may appear fully alert and engaged at one moment but unusually confused, distracted, or drowsy later.

These changes can occur throughout the day and may initially be mistaken for poor sleep or exhaustion.

3. Seeing Things That Are Not There

One particularly distinctive symptom of Lewy body dementia is recurrent visual hallucinations.

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A person might report seeing animals, children, unfamiliar people, or objects that are not actually present.

These experiences can seem extremely realistic.

Hallucinations can also result from medications, infections, visual impairment, or other medical conditions, so professional assessment is essential.

4. Acting Out Dreams During Sleep

An often-overlooked warning sign involves a sleep condition known as REM sleep behavior disorder.

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Normally, the body temporarily suppresses most voluntary muscle movement during REM sleep.

People with this disorder may physically act out their dreams by shouting, kicking, punching, or moving suddenly.

In some individuals, REM sleep behavior disorder can appear years before other symptoms of Lewy body dementia.

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However, having this sleep disorder does not mean someone will inevitably develop dementia.

5. Unexplained Stiffness or Slower Movements

Lewy body dementia can produce movement changes similar to those seen in Parkinson’s disease.

Symptoms may include muscle stiffness, slower walking, reduced facial expressions, a shuffling gait, or difficulty maintaining balance.

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These changes can increase the risk of falls and may gradually interfere with ordinary daily activities.

6. Difficulty Finding Words or Following Conversations

Someone experiencing cognitive decline may struggle to find familiar words, lose track of conversations, or have difficulty explaining their thoughts.

They might stop speaking mid-sentence or use unusual descriptions for everyday objects.

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Occasional word-finding difficulties are common, but progressive changes that interfere with communication should be investigated.

7. Unexpected Personality or Mood Changes

Dementia does not always begin with obvious memory loss.

In some cases, family members first notice changes in personality, motivation, or emotional behavior.

A previously outgoing person may become withdrawn, suspicious, unusually anxious, or less interested in activities they once enjoyed.

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Depression, medications, and other health problems can cause similar symptoms, making accurate diagnosis important.

8. Problems With Balance and Frequent Falls

Difficulty judging distances, impaired coordination, dizziness, and abnormal walking patterns can occur in certain forms of dementia.

Lewy body dementia may also affect the autonomic nervous system, which regulates automatic functions such as blood pressure.

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Some individuals develop blood pressure drops when standing, increasing their risk of fainting and falls.

Repeated falls should never be dismissed as simply a normal consequence of aging.

9. Difficulty Managing Familiar Daily Tasks

A person may begin struggling with activities they previously performed without difficulty.

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Examples include following a familiar recipe, managing finances, remembering medication schedules, or navigating familiar routes.

These changes may reflect problems involving memory, judgment, organization, or attention.

10. Unusual Confusion About Time or Place

Becoming disoriented in familiar surroundings, forgetting the current date, or struggling to understand where one is may indicate significant cognitive impairment.

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However, confusion that begins suddenly is a medical warning sign and may result from delirium, infection, stroke, medication effects, or other urgent conditions.

Sudden confusion requires prompt medical evaluation rather than being assumed to be dementia.

Alzheimer's Disease vs. Lewy Body Dementia: What's the Difference?

Although both conditions involve progressive cognitive decline, several features may help doctors distinguish them.

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Alzheimer's disease	**Lewy body dementia**
Early memory impairment is common	Early attention and visual-processing difficulties may be prominent
Usually develops gradually	Alertness and cognitive performance may fluctuate noticeably
Hallucinations are generally less prominent early on	Recurrent visual hallucinations may occur early
Movement problems often become more apparent later	Stiffness, slow movement, or balance problems may occur earlier
Sleep disturbances can occur	REM sleep behavior disorder is a characteristic feature

These differences are not absolute. Symptoms overlap, and some people experience brain changes associated with more than one condition.

A complete evaluation may involve cognitive testing, neurological examinations, medical history, laboratory testing, and brain imaging.

Can Lifestyle Changes Help Protect the Brain?

Although there is currently no cure for Alzheimer’s disease or Lewy body dementia, research suggests that certain lifestyle factors may help reduce the overall risk of cognitive decline and dementia.

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The World Health Organization emphasizes the importance of addressing modifiable risk factors throughout life.

Stay Physically Active

Regular movement supports cardiovascular health and healthy blood circulation.

Activities such as brisk walking, cycling, swimming, and resistance training can help maintain physical function while supporting overall brain health.

Even moderate activity performed consistently can be beneficial.

Follow a Nutrient-Rich Diet

A balanced diet emphasizing vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, whole grains, and healthy fats may support long-term cardiovascular and metabolic health.

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Mediterranean-style dietary patterns have been associated with better cognitive health in some studies, although no particular food or diet can guarantee dementia prevention.

Control Blood Pressure and Blood Sugar

High blood pressure, diabetes, and elevated cholesterol are associated with increased dementia risk.

Regular health checks and appropriate treatment can help protect blood vessels, including those supplying the brain.

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Protect Sleep Quality

Consistent sleep schedules, treatment of sleep apnea when present, and evaluation of persistent sleep disturbances can support general health and daytime cognitive functioning.

Persistent dream-enactment behavior should be discussed with a healthcare professional, particularly when accompanied by movement or cognitive changes.

Stay Mentally and Socially Engaged

Reading, learning new skills, participating in conversations, maintaining friendships, and engaging in meaningful activities may support cognitive resilience.

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Social isolation is also recognized as a potentially modifiable dementia risk factor.

Avoid Smoking and Excessive Alcohol Consumption

Smoking and harmful alcohol use increase several health risks associated with cognitive decline.

Avoiding tobacco and reducing excessive alcohol intake are important components of long-term preventive health.

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Can Herbs or Natural Supplements Prevent Dementia?

Interest in natural approaches to brain health has increased substantially, particularly regarding turmeric, ginkgo biloba, omega-3 fatty acids, and antioxidant-rich foods.

However, evidence remains insufficient to conclude that herbal supplements prevent or reverse Alzheimer’s disease or Lewy body dementia.

Some herbal products may also interfere with prescription medications.

Current WHO recommendations do not support routine vitamin E, B-vitamin, omega-3, or multivitamin supplementation specifically for dementia prevention in people without diagnosed deficiencies.

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Correcting genuine nutritional deficiencies remains important for general health and neurological functioning.

Natural wellness practices may complement medical care, but they should never replace diagnosis or evidence-based treatment.

When Should You Seek Medical Advice?

Not every episode of forgetfulness signals dementia.

Stress, inadequate sleep, depression, thyroid disorders, vitamin deficiencies, medication side effects, and numerous other conditions can affect concentration and memory.

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Nevertheless, persistent or worsening cognitive changes should be evaluated by a healthcare professional.

Early assessment may help identify treatable causes, improve symptom management, and allow families to plan appropriate support.

Sudden confusion, new weakness, difficulty speaking, or abrupt changes in neurological function require immediate medical attention.

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Remembering Patrick Stewart and the Importance of Brain Health Awareness

For decades, Patrick Stewart portrayed characters known for intelligence, courage, leadership, and compassion.

As Captain Jean-Luc Picard and Professor Charles Xavier, he became an internationally recognized figure whose performances inspired generations of viewers.

His death also draws attention to the profound challenges faced by people living with neurodegenerative diseases and the families caring for them.

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While the public does not know the precise course of Stewart’s illness, his reported diagnoses offer an opportunity to improve awareness about Alzheimer’s disease and Lewy body dementia.

Recognizing concerning symptoms, seeking appropriate medical evaluation, and addressing preventable health risks can make a meaningful difference.

The most important message is not to fear every forgotten name or misplaced object, but to recognize when changes in memory, movement, sleep, or behavior begin interfering with daily life.

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Awareness, compassionate care, and timely medical support remain essential.

Medical Disclaimer: This article is intended for educational and informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Dementia symptoms vary, and many conditions can cause similar changes. Consult a qualified healthcare professional about persistent cognitive, behavioral, sleep, or movement symptoms.

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