

# LEARNING ABOUT ALZHEIMER'S

DISEASE MANAGEMENT BROCHURE Vol. 10, No 2, 2008

## ACCESS NURSING SERVICES

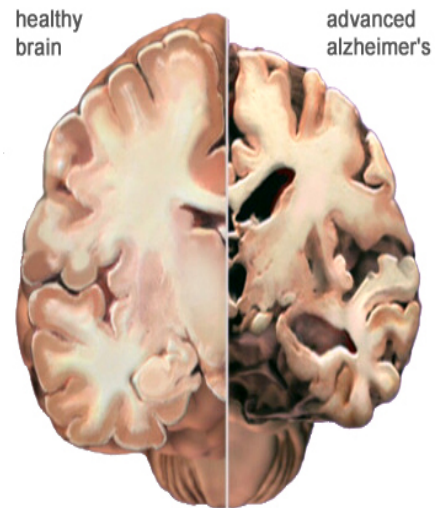


## What is Alzheimer's Disease?

Alzheimer's disease is a brain disorder named of German physician Alois Alzheimer who first described it in 1906.

Alzheimer's destroys brain cells, causing problems with memory, thinking and behavior severe enough to affect work, lifelong hobbies or social life. Alzheimer's gets worse over time, and it is fatal. Today it is the sixth-leading cause of death in the United States.

Alzheimer's is the most common form of dementia, a general term for the loss of memory and other intellectual abilities serious enough to interfere with daily life. In mixed dementia, Alzheimer's and vascular dementia occur together.



### 10 Warning signs of Alzheimer's

1. Memory loss that affects day to day function
2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks
3. Problems with language
4. Disorientation of time and place
5. Poor or decreased judgment
6. Problems with abstract thinking
7. Misplacing things
8. Changes in mood and behavior
9. Changes in personality
10. Loss of initiative

### History

In November 1906, German Dr. Alois Alzheimer presented the case of "Frau Auguste D.," a 51-year-old woman brought to see him in 1901 by her family. He gained the family's permission to perform an autopsy. In Auguste's brain, he saw dramatic shrinkage, especially of the cortex, the outer layer involved in memory, thinking, judgment and speech. Under the microscope, he also saw widespread fatty deposits in small blood vessels, dead and dying brain cells, and abnormal deposits in and around cells.



Dr. Alois Alzheimer

There are no treatments, drugs, or pills that can prevent and cure Alzheimer's, but people can take some steps that may reduce their risk. These include:

- Lowering cholesterol level
- Lowering high blood pressure
- Controlling diabetes
- Exercise regularly
- Engaging in activities that stimulate the brain
- A healthy and balanced diet

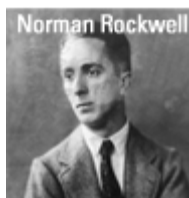
Scientists do not yet fully understand what causes Alzheimer's disease. There probably is not one single cause, but several factors that affect each person differently. Identified certain risk factors are age, family history, heredity, head injury, and heart problems.

## Stages of Alzheimer's Disease



Famous Americans had Alzheimer's

- Screen legend Rita Hayworth,
- U.S. President Ronald Reagan,
- Beloved artist Norman Rockwell
- Civil rights icon Rosa Parks



### Stage 1: No cognitive impairment

Unimpaired individuals experience no memory problems and none are evident to a health care professional during a medical interview.

### Stage 2: Very mild cognitive decline

Individuals at this stage feel as if they have memory lapses, especially in forgetting familiar words or names or the location of keys, eyeglasses, or other everyday objects. But these problems are not evident during a medical examination or apparent to friends, family, or coworkers.

### Stage 3: Mild cognitive decline

Early-stage Alzheimer's can be diagnosed in some, but not all, individuals with these symptoms. Friends, family, or co-workers begin to notice deficiencies. Common difficulties include:

- Word-or name-finding problems.
- Decreased ability to remember names.
- Performance issues in social or work.
- Inability to remember materials read.
- Losing or misplacing a valuable object.

### Stage 4: Moderate cognitive decline

Common difficulties include:

- Decreased knowledge of recent occasions or current events.
- Decreased capacity to perform complex tasks, such as marketing, planning dinner or guests, or paying bills and managing finances.
- The affected individual may seem subdued and withdrawn, especially in socially or mentally challenging situations.

### Stage 5: Moderately severe cognitive decline

At this stage, individuals may:

- Be unable to recall details such as their current address, their telephone number, or the name of the college or high school
- Become confused about where they are or about the date, day of the week, or season.
- Need help choosing proper clothing.
- Usually retain substantial knowledge about themselves and know their own name and the names of their spouse or children.

### Stage 6: Severe cognitive decline

At this stage, individuals may:

- Occasionally forget the name of their spouse or primary caregiver but generally can distinguish familiar from unfamiliar faces.
- Need help getting dressed properly; without supervision, may make such errors as putting pajamas over daytime clothes or shoes on wrong feet.
- Need help with handling details of toileting (flushing toilet, wiping, and disposing of tissue).

- Have increasing episodes of urinary or fecal incontinence.
- Experience personality changes and behavioral symptoms, including suspiciousness and delusions.

### Stage 7: Very severe cognitive decline

- Frequently individuals lose their capacity for recognizable speech, although words or phrases may occasionally be uttered.
- Individuals need help with eating and toileting and there is general incontinence of urine.
- Swallowing is impaired.

## How is Alzheimer's Disease Treated?

### Medication for cognitive symptoms

■ **Cholinesterase inhibitor** prevent the breakdown of acetylcholine, a chemical messenger important for learning and memory: Aricept, Exelon, Razadtrne

■ **Memantine** (Namenda) works by regulating the activity of glutamate, a different messenger chemical involved in learning and memory.

### Medication for behavioral and psychiatric symptoms

■ **Antidepressant** medication for low mood and irritability: Celex, Prozac, Zoloft, Desyrel, Paxil

■ **Anxiolytics** for anxiety, restlessness, verbally disruptive behavior and resistance: Ativan, Serax

■ **Antipsychotic** medications for hallucinations, delusions, aggression, agitation, hostility and

uncooperativeness: Abilify, Clozaril, Haldol, Zyprexa, Seroquel, Risperdal, Geodon

### Medication for sleep changes

• **Tricyclic antidepressants**, such as nortriptyline and trazodone

• **Benzodiazepines**, such as lorazepam and temazepam

• **“Sleeping pills”** such as zolpidem, zaleplon, and chloral hydrate

• **“Atypical” antipsychotics** such as risperidone, onanzapine and quetiapine

### Vitamin E

Vitamin E may help because it is an antioxidant, a substance that may protect nerve from certain kinds of chemical wear and tear.

## Management Tips for Caregivers

### Wandering

Wandering can be caused by several factors, including:

- Medication side effects.
- Stress.
- Confusion related to time
- Restlessness, agitation or anxiety.

• Inability to recognize familiar people, places and objects.

• Fear arising from the misinterpretation of sights and sounds.

• Desire to fulfill former obligations, such as going to work or looking after a child.

• Encourage movement and exercise to reduce anxiety, agitation, and restlessness

• Involve the person in daily activities

• Remind the person that their in the right place

• Reassure the person

### Tips for Reducing Wandering Behavior;



if he or she feels lost, abandoned, or disoriented

### Agitation

Triggers of Agitation can include:

- Change in caregiver
- Change in living arrangements
- Travel
- Hospitalization
- Presence of house-guests
- Bathing

### Preventing agitation

- Create a calm environment
- Avoid environment triggers
- Allow adequate time and rest between stimulating events
- Monitor personal comfort
- Use lighting to reduce confusion
- Simplify tasks and routines

### Tips During Episode of Agitation

#### Do:

Redirect the person's attention, use calm positive statements, offer guided choices between two options, focus on pleasant events.

#### DO NOT:

Raise voice, restrain, rush, criticize, ignore, argue, shame, demand or force the person.





As many as 5.2 million people in the United States are living with Alzheimer's.

10 million baby boomers will develop Alzheimer's in their lifetime.

Every 71 seconds, someone develops Alzheimer's.

## Combativeness

When a person with Alzheimer's is frustrated, scared, or unable to communicate, they may become aggressive and even combative.

### Possible causes

- Physical discomfort

- Environmental factors
- Poor communication

### Tips for combativeness

- Identify signs of frustration
- Don't take the behavior personally
- Avoid elaborate explanations and arguments.
- Distract the person with another activity
- Avoid expressing anger or impatience in your voice or physical action.

## Incontinence

It is common for a person with Alzheimer's to experience loss of bladder and/or bowel control. This can be caused by:

- Medical conditions
- Fear
- Abrupt movement
- Dehydration
- Diuretics

- Clothing

- Environment

### Tips for Incontinence

- Provide visual cues. Signs may assist an individual in finding the bathroom.
- Identify when accidents occur and plan accordingly. To help control incontinence at night, limit the intake of liquids after dinner and in the evening.
- Make sure clothing is easy for the client to remove. Clothing with Velcro may be easier for the client to remove than clothing with buttons.
- Provide reminders.
- Be supportive. A reassuring attitude will help lessen feelings of embarrassment.

## Sleeplessness and Sundowning

Late day confusion or sundowning caused by the following factors:

- End of exhaustion.
- An upset in the "internal body clock,"

causing a biological mix-up between day and night.

- Reduced lighting and increased shadows.

### Tips for combativeness

- Plan more active days.
- Limit daytime napping
- Restrict access to sweets and caffeine late in the day.
- Allow the person to sleep in the most comfortable bed or chair.
- Try to keep bedtime at a similar time each evening.

## Communication

The person with dementia may experience changes in communication such as:

- Difficulty finding the right words
- Using familiar words repeatedly
- Inventing new words to describe familiar objects

- Easily lose their train of thought
- Difficulty organizing words logically
- Reverting to speaking in a native language
- Using curse words
- Speaking less often
- More often relying on gestures instead of speaking

### Tips for communication

- Be calm and supportive
- Focus on the feelings, not the facts
- Pay attention to tone of voice
- Address the client by his or her name
- Speak slowly, and use short, simple words.
- Ask one question at a time
- Avoid vague words and negative statements
- Don't talk about the person as if he or she weren't there
- Use unspoken communication, like pointing



## How can you Help Clients Manage AD?

### Eating

- Set up a regular mealtime and stick to it.
- Limit distractions.
- Keep the table setting simple.
- Choose soft foods that can be chewed and swallowed easily
- Make sure the client is in a comfortable, upright position.
- Check the food temperature. Serve only one or two foods at a time.
- Be flexible to food preferences.
- Give the client plenty of time to eat.
- Avoid nuts, popcorn and raw carrots.



### Bathing

- Set a regular time of day for bathing.
- Tell the client what you are going to do, step by step, and allow him or her to do as much as possible.
- Minimize safety risks by using a handheld showerhead, shower bench, grab bars, and nonskid bath mats.
- Never leave the client alone in the bath or shower.
- Try a sponge bath.
- Be sure the client's genital area are washed, especially if incontinence is a problem.
- Be sure the client is washed between folds of skin and under the breasts.

### Dental Care

- Provide short, simple instructions.



- Hold a toothbrush, and show the clients how to brush their teeth.
- Remove and clean dentures every night.

### Dressing

- Try offering just two choices of shirts and pants.
- Provide simple direction .
- Keep the closets free of excess clothing.
- Chose comfortable and simple clothing and non-slip shoes.
- Offer praise, not criticism, if clothing is mismatched.

### Grooming

- Maintain grooming routines. if the client goes to the beauty shop or a barber, continue this activity.
- Use safer, simpler grooming tools such as cardboard nail files and electric shavers.



### Activities at Home

- Be flexible and patient.
- Encourage involvement in daily life.
- Avoid correcting the clients.
- Help the clients remain as independent as possible.
- Offer opportunities for choice.
- Simplify instructions.
- Establish a familiar routine.
- Respond to the client's feeling.
- Simplify, structure and supervise.
- Provide encouragement and praise.

### Home Safety

- Lock or disguise hazardous areas.
- Use contrasting colored rugs in front of doors or steps.
- Use night lights in hallways, bedrooms and bathrooms to prevent accidents and reduce disorientation.

- Add textured stickers to slippery surfaces.
- Supervise the client while taking medication.
- Put away dangerous appliances and utensils like mixers and knives.
- Clean out the refrigerator regularly.

- Check fire extinguishers and smoke alarms.
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers and address for local police and fire departments, hospitals and poison control help lines.



## POST TEST

Please circle the best choice and then check your answers with educator. **You may submit this paper to your coordinator or send by mail to office.**

1. True or False

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia among older people.

2. True or False

When researchers examine the brains of people who died of Alzheimer's, they find nothing unusual.

3. True or False

Alzheimer's disease comes on quickly, with little advance warning.

4. True or False

Currently, there is no treatment or drug that can prevent and cure for Alzheimer's disease.

5. If a client with Alzheimer's has trouble sleeping at night, the caregiver should:

- A. Plan more active days
- B. Limit daytime napping
- C. Try to keep bedtime at a similar time each Evening
- D. All of the above

6. To minimize safety risks when helping a client bathe, caregiver should:

- A. Never leave the client alone in the bath
- B. Using a handheld shower bench, grab bars
- C. Make sure the bathtub has non-skid covering
- D. All of the above

7. Which of the following is a good way to help keep the brain healthy?

- A. Stay mentally active
- B. Exercise 30 minutes most days
- C. Eat a diet low in fat and cholesterol, and rich in dark-skinned fruits and vegetables
- D. All of the above

8. Which of the following is a symptom of early stage of Alzheimer's?

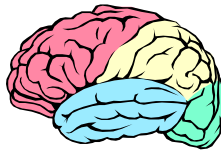
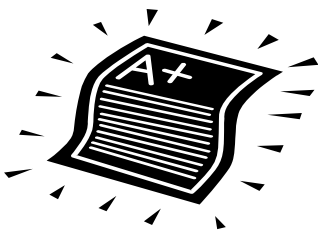
- A. Dizziness
- B. Forgetfulness
- C. Loss of appetite
- D. Swallowing problem

9. At mealtimes, it is best to provide a client with Alzheimer's with:

- A. a wide variety of food choice
- B. at least 6 or 7 food choices
- C. a limited number of food choices

10. When communicating with Mr. Kelly who has Alzheimer's, it is a good idea to:

- A. Speak loudly
- B. Use baby talk
- C. Talk as if client weren't there
- D. Use a calm, gentle tone of voice



INSERVICE CREDIT: **1 HOUR**

SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYEE NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

EDUCATOR SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

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