

Alzheimer's Disease

"The Disease of the Century"

BASIC FACTS:

Alzheimer's disease is a brain disorder that gradually destroys the ability to reason, remember, imagine and learn. It is distinctly different from forgetfulness that is usually found in the elderly. The disease progresses slowly, taking between 3 to 18 years to advance from the earliest symptoms to death. Death results not from the progression of the disease, but from a secondary illness such as pneumonia or urinary tract infection. There is no cure for the disease, but treatments focus on slowing the progression of the disease and coping with the symptoms.

Alzheimer's disease affects nearly 4 million people in the United States, with this number expected to increase to 14 million with the aging of the baby boom generation. Alzheimer's affects 10% or more of those over the age of 65 and half of individuals 85 and older. Though it is usually a disease known commonly in the elderly, a rare, aggressive form of the disease has been found in individuals in their 40's and 50's. Women make up more than half of the population fighting Alzheimer's, With the growing prevalence of Alzheimer's, it is now known as "the disease of the century".

RISK FACTORS:

1. Increasing Age - the main risk factor; the older you grow, the greater the risk.
2. Family History - having a close relative with the disease increases your risk of developing the disease.
3. Being Female - women have a higher risk of developing Alzheimer's than men.
4. Environmental Factors - environmental factors may influence any genetic predisposition to the disease.

PREVENTION:

1. Hormone Therapy - this is especially important for postmenopausal women; remember, women are more prone to Alzheimer's than men.
2. Pay Attention - enhancing your memory can help defend against the disease.
3. Get Organized - this will help to reduce the stress in your life, which will not only help defend against Alzheimer's but many other diseases.
4. Control Your Blood Pressure
5. Take an Aspirin a Day
6. Exercise Regularly
7. Lead an Intellectually Active Life
8. Don't Smoke
9. Control Alcohol Consumption
10. Get Enough Sleep

DIAGNOSIS:

Alzheimer's disease is caused by abnormal clumps and irregular knots of brain cells that take over healthy brain cells, ultimately destroying the areas associated with intellectual function. Unfortunately, there is not a simple test available to let physicians make an absolute diagnosis of Alzheimer's. Diagnosis is then left up to the judgment of the physician.

These are 10 warning signs that can aid a physician in making an absolute diagnosis:

1. Recent memory loss that affects job skills
2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks
3. Language problems
4. Time and place disorientation
5. Loss of judgment
6. Problems with abstract thinking
7. Misplacing things
8. Changes in mood or behavior
9. Changes in personality
10. Loss of initiative

Other symptoms may include depression, anxiety, paranoia, seizures, problems with mobility, and loss of vision and coordination.

The progression of the disease is slow. It may take anywhere from 3 to 18 years for the symptoms to advance to the point where the brain forgets how to live. Death is often the result of secondary illnesses such as pneumonia or complications of immobility.

The progression of the disease can be broken down into 7 stages:

Stage 1: Normal Adult	No functional decline.
Stage 2: Normal Older Adult	Personal awareness of some functional decline.
Stage 3: Early Alzheimer's Disease	Noticeable deficits in demanding job situations.
Stage 4: Mild Alzheimer's	Requires assistance in complicated tasks such as handling finances and planning parties.
Stage 5: Moderate Alzheimer's	Requires assistance in choosing proper attire.
Stage 6: Moderately Severe Alzheimer's	Requires assistance in dressing, bathing, and toileting. Has urinary and fecal incontinence.
Stage 7: Severe Alzheimer's	Speech ability declines to about a half-dozen intelligible words. Progressive loss of abilities to walk, sit up, smile, and hold head up.

TREATMENT:

There is no cure for Alzheimer's. Treatments are usually centered on attempting to improve the quality of life for the patient, keeping them safe, and making caring for them easier. Drug treatments are aimed at slowing the progression of the disease and lessening the disease's symptoms. Other than conventional treatments some physicians suggest alternative treatments such as antioxidants, massage, and aromatherapy.

For More Information and Resources:



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