

Dealing with Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's Disease, also known as AD, is the most common form of dementia, a condition in which a person's mental abilities become severely impaired. It affects nearly 5.4 million Americans.

What is Alzheimer's?

It is a condition in which the brain's functions gradually deteriorate, leading to numerous health problems and eventually death. It's

cause and progression are not well-known, though in a few cases, some genetic influence may play a part. Alzheimer's mostly occurs in people over 65, though in some rare cases it can afflict people younger than this.

Symptoms of Alzheimers

In its early stages, the most common symptom is difficulty remembering recent events.

Eventually, as the disease advances, various other mental conditions may emerge, including some or all of the following: confusion, mood swings, irritability and aggression, trouble speaking, and long-term memory loss.

As AD continues, these symptoms worsen. The afflicted person will often isolate themselves from loved ones and society as a whole. In its most advanced form, there will be a nearly total loss of speech, the subject may forget close relatives, and most bodily functions are lost. At this stage, the afflicted person is completely dependent upon caregivers, and the disease ultimately leads to death.



The average life expectancy for someone with Alzheimer's following a diagnosis is around 7 years. Only around 3% of victims manage to live 14 years or more.

Diagnosing Alzheimer's

Because it mostly begins to affect the elderly, diagnosing Alzheimer's can be difficult, since most signs of it can be mistaken with normal age-related conditions. The rate and form in which Alzheimer's develops varies from person to person. Furthermore, AD often develops for an unknown amount of time before it becomes noticeable. Because of these factors, it can be difficult to predict how exactly it will affect someone; thus it's important for elderly loved ones, especially those over the age of 65, to get regular health check-ups, especially if they are showing any signs of memory loss or functional impairment.

Treating AD

There is currently no cure for the disease, although some pharmaceutical treatments exist to lessen its effects.

While exercise, healthy eating, and mentally stimulating activities may help, there is no solid evidence that these will prevent or slow-down the disease's progression.

The most important thing that loved ones can offer is caregiving, in which they provide practical,

emotional, and psychological support to those diagnosed with AD.

To learn more about Alzheimer's and what you can do, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/aging/aginginfo/alzheimers.htm>

HIGHLIGHTS

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It's important for elderly loved ones, especially those over the age of 65, to get regular health check-ups, especially if they are showing any signs of memory loss or functional impairment.

The most vital thing that loved ones can offer for AD victims is practical, emotional, and psychological support.

For more health topics, visit www.dadehealth.org/atoz/atoz.asp