



ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A brain disorder that involves gradual mental deterioration. The more gradual form, with slow development of symptoms, begins around ages 65 to 70. A rapidly progressive form begins in adults around ages 36 to 45.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Early stages:

- Forgetful of recent events.
- Increasing difficulty doing mental tasks, such as usual work, balancing a checkbook, or maintaining a household.
- Personality changes, including poor impulse control and poor judgment.

Later stages:

- Difficulty doing simple tasks, such as choosing clothing, solving problems.
- Failure to recognize familiar persons.
- Lack of interest in personal hygiene or appearance.
- Difficulty feeding self.
- Belligerence and denial that anything is wrong.
- Loss of usual sexual inhibitions.
- Wandering away.
- Anxiety and insomnia.

Advanced stages:

- Complete loss of memory, speech, and muscle function. This includes bladder and bowel control.

CAUSES

Damage to or loss of brain cells for unknown reasons.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Family history of Alzheimer's disease.
- Other genetic factors.
- Aging.
- Research shows that factors related to blood circulation may be involved (such as those causing heart disease or stroke).

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

No specific preventive measures.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

There is no cure. Treatment helps slow the progress and helps relieve the symptoms. Patients may progress from onset of symptoms to end-stage disease in 8 to 10 years. This varies from person to person. Those with end-stage disease often need the care provided in an assisted living facility that handles Alzheimer's patients.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Infections. They are a major cause of death in Alzheimer's patients.
- Final stages of the disease will lead to death.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about the symptoms. There is no specific test to diagnose Alzheimer's. Medical tests may include cognitive tests (answering questions). Blood, urine, and spinal fluid studies, heart studies, CT, MRI, PET scans or others help rule out other disorders.
- A diagnosis of Alzheimer's is overwhelming, both for the patient and the family. Educate yourselves as much as possible about what to expect and how to plan for it. With early diagnosis, the patient can take part in making decisions for the future.
- Treatment will depend on the stage of the disease. Different drugs are available that can help slow the progress of the disease.
- Drugs to treat the behavior symptoms can help make a patient more comfortable and make their care easier.
- Caring for a family member with Alzheimer's is a difficult task. Caregivers need to take care of themselves. Joining a support group for caregivers may be helpful.
- To learn more:

Alzheimer's Association, 225 N. Michigan Ave., Fl 17, Chicago. Il 60601; (800) 272-3900; website: www.alz.org. - Alzheimer's Disease Education & Referral Center, (800) 438-4380; website: www.alzheimers.org.

MEDICATIONS

- Drugs that slow the progress of the disease for a limited time are usually prescribed.
- Drugs as needed to help control behavior symptoms (insomnia, agitation, wandering, depression, anxiety, and others) will be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

With time, all patient activity will require supervision.

DIET

Regular diet. Feeding help will eventually be needed.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.
- Caregivers have any questions or concerns about the patient, the symptoms, or the treatment.

