



Ask A Health Care Professional

By Latha Raja Shankar, M.D.,
Chief Medical Officer, Blue Cross
and Blue Shield of New Mexico

As we age, natural changes in the brain occur. These may result in slower processing speeds and greater difficulty multi-tasking, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Alzheimer's disease, however, is not a normal part of the aging process, though it impacts a significant portion of the population. An estimated 6.5 million Americans are living with this progressive and eventually fatal illness. This number is projected to nearly triple to 14 million people by 2060, the CDC says. As there remains no cure, awareness of signs and symptoms is critical to appropriate treatment.

What is Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's disease is a form of dementia. This disease affects the parts of brain that control thought, memory and language. It begins as mild memory loss, progressing to an inability to carry on conversations, respond to the environment, and conduct daily activities.

What causes Alzheimer's?

While causes of Alzheimer's disease are not clearly understood,

several factors have been shown to be contributing factors.

Age poses a definite risk, and genetics may also play a role. It is important to note that changes in the brain start several years before the symptoms begin. However, healthy lifestyle habits help reduce the risk of this disease. For example, two large long-term studies indicate that adequate physical activity, a nutritious diet, limited alcohol intake and quitting smoking reduce the likelihood of Alzheimer's disease.

What can you do to reduce Alzheimer disease risk?

- Exercise regularly.
- Eat a healthful diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables.
- Spend time with family and friends.
- Keep your mind active.
- Control type 2 diabetes.
- Keep blood pressure and cholesterol at healthy levels.
- Maintain a healthy body weight.
- Stop smoking.
- Get help for depression.
- Avoid drinking a lot of alcohol.
- Get plenty of sleep.

What are some warning signs and how should you respond?

Memory problems are typically the first indications of Alzheimer's

disease. Additionally, people who develop Alzheimer's may get lost in familiar places; have trouble handling money or paying bills; exhibit poor judgement; experience changes in mood, personality or behavior; ask the same questions over and over again; and have difficulty following directions.

However, presentation of these symptoms may not mean that a person has Alzheimer's. This is why it is important to see a health care provider if any of these symptoms are exhibited. A medical provider can evaluate the symptoms to determine whether there may be other underlying causes with potential for reversal, before giving a diagnosis of Alzheimer's dementia.

What is the treatment for Alzheimer's?

Several prescription drugs are approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration to help manage and potentially reduce symptoms related to thinking and behavior. These medications have been shown to provide the greatest benefit to people in the early or middle stages of the disease, providing them with comfort, dignity and independence for a longer period.

Keep in mind that some other medicines, such as sleep aids or drugs to reduce anxiety or aggression, warrant extra caution when used by people with Alzheimer's disease.

Resources for patients and caregivers of those with an Alzheimer's diagnosis:

- Alzheimer's and Related Dementias Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center: 800-438-4380
- Alzheimer's Association: 800-272-3900
- Alzheimer's Foundation of America: 866-232-8484
- Local hospitals and community centers may have educational programs about Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

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