

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

(Presenile Dementia)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

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

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Early stages:

- Forgetfulness of recent events.
- Increasing difficulty performing intellectual 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.
- Disinterest 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 (including bladder and bowel control), necessitating total care and supervision.
- Extreme belligerence and hostility.

CAUSES

Irreversible damage to or loss of brain cells for unknown reasons.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Family history of Alzheimer's disease.
- Aging.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

No specific preventive measures.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This condition is currently incurable and treatment is directed to relieving the symptoms. Research into causes and treatment continues, so there is hope for eventual treatment and cure.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Decreased resistance to infections, especially pneumonia and meningitis.
- Seizures and coma (rare).



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- If a family member has this disease, don't take their hostility personally.
- Modify the home environment for safety.
- If you care for a family member with the disease, try to obtain help so you can get away often. Don't feel guilty about needing a respite even if the patient resents it.
- Join or start a support group for families of Alzheimer's victims. Contact the Alzheimer's Association for information at (800) 272-3900.
- Caregivers can help reduce some of the patients behaviors by:
 - Repetition: Patients with memory problems may benefit from frequent, simple reminders.
 - Reassurance: A brief, firm chat may help a patient with anxiety, verbal outbursts or agitation.
 - Redirection: Distract a patient who is frustrated or agitated. A short walk can be helpful.

MEDICATIONS

- Many medications for other conditions can cause confusion or sedation, and these should be discontinued if possible. Many other medications are being studied. Some are useful to control symptoms such as agitation.
- New prescription drugs may help delay progression in some patients.

ACTIVITY

As much as possible. As the condition progresses, all activity eventually will require supervision.

DIET

Regular diet. Feeding assistance eventually will be necessary.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.
- Signs of infection occur, such as fever, chills, muscle aches or headache.
- You care for someone with Alzheimer's disease, and you fear you are about to lose emotional control.