



# Alzheimer's Disease

## WHAT IS ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE?

The occurrence of Alzheimer's disease (AD) is not normal aging. Alzheimer's disease is characterized by a gradual loss of memory, decline in the ability to perform routine tasks, disorientation, difficulty in learning, loss of language skills, impaired judgment and ability to plan, and personality changes. Over time, these changes become so severe that they interfere with an individual's daily functioning, eventually requiring total assistance with daily activities. The disease can last from 3 to over 10 years after the onset of symptoms. Alzheimer's disease affects as many as 5.1 million Americans. Most people diagnosed with AD are older than 60. However, it is possible to be diagnosed with early-onset AD between the ages of 30 and 60.

## SYMPTOMS

Alzheimer's disease manifests itself slowly with the first symptoms often appearing to be mild forgetfulness. From time to time, we all forget where we have put our keys, but people with early stage AD may notice that they tend to forget things more often. They may have trouble finding words or have poor judgment. As the disease progresses, the symptoms become serious enough to cause people with AD or their family members to recognize that the person's ability to function in social situations or on the job is seriously impacted. As the disease progresses further, people with AD eventually forget how to do simple tasks like brushing their teeth, or combing their hair. They begin to have problems speaking, understanding, reading or writing. Later on,

people with AD may become anxious or aggressive and may wander away from home. Near the end, the person may be in bed most or all of the time as the body shuts down.

## DIAGNOSIS

Early and careful evaluation is important, because it can help determine whether symptoms are from AD or another cause, such as stroke, sleep disturbances, side effects of medication or other conditions, including some that are treatable or reversible. There is no single test to identify AD. A comprehensive exam should be conducted by your physician including a complete health history and physical exam, neurological and mental status assessments, as well as other lab tests (like blood tests) and brain scans. A definitive diagnosis is possible, however, only through the examination of brain tissue at autopsy.

## TREATMENT AND CARE

While there is no known cure for AD, scientists have found a few medications which may help control some of the symptoms. People with AD must work closely with their doctor to determine which drugs and activities are best for them because response to medications varies for each person. As researchers continue to learn more about the disease, new possibilities arise. Information about cutting-edge treatments and new scientific discoveries is available from physicians and the sources listed under 'Additional Information & Resources'. Through the [Alzheimer's Disease Supportive Services Program](#), a grants program funded

by the Administration on Aging (AoA), new dementia-specific approaches to early identification, treatment, and community-based care have been developed. These projects have been especially successful in working with low-income, ethnic minority and rural families.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION & RESOURCES**

For more information about AD services and resources contact:

#### **ALZHEIMERS.GOV**

<http://www.alzheimers.gov/>

Provides information about AD, such as symptoms, treatment, caregiver resources, and National Alzheimer's Project Act. Includes web links to many other resources

#### **ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE SUPPORTIVE SERVICES PROGRAM**

[http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/AoA\\_Programs/HPW/Alz\\_Grants/index.aspx](http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/AoA_Programs/HPW/Alz_Grants/index.aspx) Provides information on the program, current projects, and resources for professionals who work in the field of AD or dementia.

#### **ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE SUPPORTIVE SERVICES PROGRAM RESOURCE CENTER**

<http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-index.php?page=AboutADSSP>

Provides information about ADSSP grants and their products and ADSSP Resource Center publications.

#### **NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING**

Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center (ADEAR)

Information Specialists- 1-800-438-4380  
<http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers>. Provides

comprehensive and thoroughly researched information on AD, including its causes, treatment, cures, and diagnostic tools.

#### **NATIONAL ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION**

24-hour Toll-Free Nationwide Helpline:  
1-800-272-3900

<http://www.alz.org/>

Provides information on care and support for those with AD and their caregivers and AD related research.

#### **OLDER AMERICANS ACT PROGRAMS**

[http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/AoA\\_Programs/HCLTC/index.aspx](http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/AoA_Programs/HCLTC/index.aspx)

Provides information on Older Americans Act programs that help older adults maintain independence in their homes and communities and information on funding for caregiver supports.

#### **HOME AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES**

<http://www.medicaid.gov/Medicaid-CHIP-Program-Information/By-Topics/Long-Term-Services-and-Support/Home-and-Community-Based-Services/Home-and-Community-Based-Services.html>

Provides information on HCBS programs for Medicaid beneficiaries to receive services in their homes or community based settings.

#### **For more information about ACL**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living, Washington DC 20201

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Fax: (202) 357 – 3555

Email: [ACLinfo@acl.hhs.gov](mailto:ACLinfo@acl.hhs.gov)

Web: <http://www.aoa.gov>

