

ALL ABOUT ALZHEIMER

I don't know what I did last summer Alzheimer

It's natural for people to get forgetful as they age. And when we notice signs of forgetfulness in our loved ones, we tend to write it off attributing it to old age. But sometimes it could even be the early stages of Alzheimer. How do you recognize the disease in its early stages? Alzheimer may not be very apparent, but noticing some early signs could be of great help.

Signs that you must not ignore

Long term memories are not affected, but short term memories become hazy

Repeating a conversation verbatim again and again

Asking the same question over a period of time repeatedly

Getting lost in a familiar location and searching bewildered for a way out

Forgetting how to do simple tasks that he/she were very comfortable doing like minor repairs, cooking, gardening, etc.

Finding it difficult to manage simple affairs like a bank account or paying bills

Forgetting to bathe and insisting that they have, wearing unclean clothes and insisting they are clean.

Struggle to remember common words

Feeling hurt for no reason at all

These are some of the signs that may indicate the advent of Alzheimer in your loved one. While it could be a harmless thyroid imbalance that's causing some of these symptoms, it helps to see a doctor and ascertain the nature of these signs. The earlier the disease is identified, the better its adversity can be delayed.

It is not easy to diagnose Alzheimer. It is usually identified over a combination of tests and counseling. A brain scan can help eliminate other reasons and give relevant information about the disease.

Living with Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's disease causes tissue loss and nerve cell death across the brain. The disease progressively causes the brain tissue to shrink and enlarge the ventricles. This damages the communication between the brain cells and impedes speech, understanding and memory. Alzheimer is fatal and leads to severe memory loss and impairment of ability to perform even simple daily tasks. However, it takes different paths with different individuals. The symptoms may worsen quicker in some people than in others. The average time that an Alzheimer patient survives is between three to nine years.

The memory loss and lack of coordination worsens as time progresses. The patient may at some point not recognize even family members. They will lose all sense of proportions and propriety and might get lost in their own confusion. Simple tasks like attending to your bank Cheque book might prove difficult for them. They will slowly lose ability to do things that they had loved at some point in their lives. Driving is out of question and eventually even simple movements like standing and walking in a straight line may have to be aided.

Treatment and Care

There is no cure for Alzheimer. However with a combination of medication and counseling the deterioration can be delayed. However, one must be warned that medication used to delay the loss of mental faculty might have side effects that can be painful. The effects of different medicines differ with individual symptoms and conditions. Therefore it's important that your doctor delves into all details of health and mental history of the patient and prescribes the best possible medication.

Exercise can be of great help for people suffering from Alzheimer as it can help build muscle strength and maintain coordination. It can even help elevate the mood of the patients and keep them in good spirits.

Taking care of an Alzheimer patient is a full time effort and it requires you to play multiple roles. The patient's reliance on the caregiver grows as the symptoms worsen and then they reach a stage when they don't recognize even the caretaker they had depended so much upon. In the early stages of the disease, patients are aware of the happenings and might feel guilty of the pain and trouble they are causing. It is important that you keep them away from slipping into depression. It will be helpful to label medicines with timings on them and to write up reminders on stick-it notes.

Caretakers challenge

As the disease progresses, patients might turn very difficult and sometimes even violent. Please remember that it is the disease that's responsible and these bouts of depression and violence are not voluntary. Taking care of an Alzheimer patient can be taxing. If you see any of the following signs of stress, pay attention and take a break.

Anger, blues, and mood swings.

Headaches, shoulder or back pain.

Concentration problems

Sleeping problems

Take a break and make sure you devote some time every day to indulge in an activity that cheers you and keeps your mind off the patient.

Professional Assistance

Caring for a loved one with Alzheimer all by yourself may not be practically possible in some situations. Professional help is available in most parts of the country today and thankfully there are trained professionals to handle the patients. Do remember that after a certain stage it is not good either for the patient or you for the care to be continued at home. Be prepared to move them to a professional facility where they will be cared for till the end. Remember, towards the end, the patient will find difficulty to do even vital functions like swallow food. It is a painful stage and a professional setup is better equipped to handle this condition.

Are you at risk?

There is nothing that says you are at risk and nothing that says you aren't. Research in that area is an ongoing agenda and might take a while before something concrete is published. However, a healthy and balanced diet and lifestyle is key to a healthy mind. Research, however, suggests that people who are physically active are less prone to the disease.