

The effects of Alzheimer Disease

Alzheimer Disease eventually affects all aspects of a person's life: how he or she thinks, feels and acts. Individuals are affected differently. It is difficult to predict the symptoms each person will have, the order they will appear or the speed of the disease's progression. The following will be affected by the disease:

Mental abilities - A person's ability to understand, think, remember and communicate will be affected. The ability to make decisions will be reduced. Simple tasks that have been performed for years will become more difficult or be forgotten. Confusion and memory loss, initially for recent events and eventually for long-term events, will occur. The ability to find the right words and follow a conversation will be affected.

Emotions and moods - A person's ability to control mood and emotion will be lost. Some individuals have less expression, are more withdrawn or less active. As the disease progresses, the person may no longer recognize people or familiar places.

Behaviour - Changes in the brain will bring about changes in the way the person reacts to his or her environment. These actions may seem out of character for the person. Some common reactions include wandering from home, repeating the same action or words, hiding possessions, physical outbursts, restlessness or inappropriate sexual advances.

*The Alzheimer Society has information and support programs.
Find the Society nearest you and give them a call.
We are here to help. You are not alone.*

For more information or support contact:

Alzheimer Society of Durham Region
419 King St. West, Suite 207
Oshawa, Ont. L1J 2K5
PH: (905) 576-2567 Fax: (905) 576-2033
Toll Free: 1-888-307-1106
www.alzheimerdurham.com

or check your phonebook for your local Alzheimer Society.

*Cover: ECD SPECT scan on the top shows a brain with Alzheimer Disease
and the SPECT scan on the bottom shows a healthy brain.*

*ECD SPECT scans were provided by Masanori Ichise, MD FRCPC
(Mount Sinai Hospital Toronto/NIH Bethesda MD).*

*MRI images courtesy of Sunnybrook and Women's College
Health Sciences Centre.*

Alzheimer Society

Alzheimer Society of Canada
20 Eglinton Avenue West, Suite 1200, Toronto, Ontario, M4R 1K8
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Physical abilities - The disease can affect a person's physical co-ordination. As the disease progresses, there will be a gradual physical decline. These changes will impact on the person's ability to independently perform day-to-day tasks, such as eating, bathing and getting dressed.

Although the disease results in changes, it does not affect the person's ability to appreciate, respond to and experience feelings such as joy, anger, fear, love or sadness.

By understanding the person's personality, life experiences, support systems and ways of coping, an approach to care can be created that preserves the individual's quality of life.

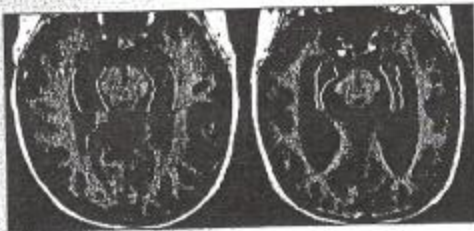
Living with Alzheimer Disease

People are now being diagnosed with Alzheimer Disease earlier in the disease process.

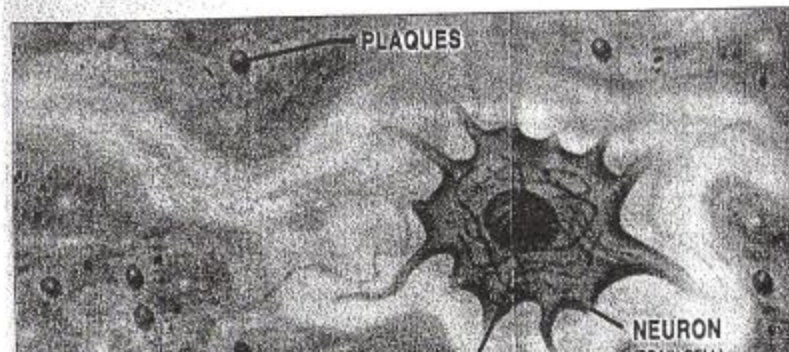
Advances in research have made treatments available that can help with symptoms of the disease for some people. Individuals with the disease are seeking information and support about the issues and concerns that affect them. The Alzheimer Society has developed a number of resources to help the person living with the disease, including the "I Have Alzheimer Disease" section on our Web site—(www.alzheimer.ca). Local Societies may also have support groups specifically for the person living with the disease.

What we know about Alzheimer Disease

Alzheimer Disease is a progressive, degenerative disease. There is no known cause or cure. Several changes occur in the brains of people with Alzheimer Disease. The brain cells shrink or disappear, and are replaced by dense, irregularly-shaped spots, or plaques. Another indicator of the disease is thread-like tangles within existing brain cells. These tangles eventually choke healthy brain cells (bottom illustration).



As the image above shows, a person with Alzheimer Disease has less brain tissue (right) than a person who does not have the disease (left). This shrinkage will continue over time, affecting how the brain functions.



Symptoms of Alzheimer Disease

Alzheimer Disease is the leading cause of dementia, a set of symptoms that includes loss of memory, judgement and reasoning, and changes in mood and behaviour. Alzheimer Disease is not a normal part of aging. Therefore, it is important to see a doctor when any of these symptoms occurs. A comprehensive assessment will determine whether the symptoms are due to another condition or to Alzheimer Disease.

Treatment for Alzheimer Disease

There is currently no cure for Alzheimer Disease and no treatment that will stop its progression. However, several medications are available that help with some symptoms. These medications can slow down the decline of memory, language and thinking abilities. The treatments do not work for everyone and are effective for a limited time.

Risk factors for Alzheimer Disease

The specific cause of Alzheimer Disease is unknown. However certain risk factors have been associated with the disease. Two of these are age and family history. Risk factors do not cause a disease; they indicate possible links to the disease. Uncovering risk factors increases our understanding of Alzheimer Disease.

Age - Most people who develop Alzheimer Disease are over the age of 65; and the older you become, the higher the risk for developing the disease. Some people have been diagnosed at a younger age. The term early onset is often used to refer to people who are diagnosed with Alzheimer Disease in their 40s or 50s.

Family History - People with a parent, brother or sister with Alzheimer Disease have a greater chance of developing the disease than those with no family history.

Other factors being investigated by scientists include education level, genetics, toxins in the environment, diet and exercise.

Forms of Alzheimer Disease

Sporadic Alzheimer Disease is the more common form of the disease and accounts for 90 to 95 percent of all cases. The role of heredity in this form is unclear and is the subject of much research.

Familial Autosomal Dominant Alzheimer Disease is a less common form of the disease and accounts for 5 to 10 percent of known cases. In certain families, this form is passed directly from one generation to another.