Alzheimer’s Disease

Alzheimer’s disease (AD) is a progressive disorder caused by abnormal accumulation of toxic proteins that kill brain cells. The disease affects memory, language, directional skills, thinking and behavior. The condition often begins after age 60 and is present in nearly half of those over 85. However, it is not an inevitable part of aging.

Signs of Alzheimer’s Disease

Signs of AD progress over time and include:

- Memory loss
- Problems with thinking
- Word finding
- Getting lost
- Restlessness
- Mood swings
- Personality changes

Caring for a Person with Alzheimer’s Disease

If you or a loved one has memory loss, visit the doctor for testing. Your doctor will work with you to manage problems, suggest changes to the home, and give support to family members and other caregivers.

Medicines should be started as soon as possible to have the best effect on thinking and behavior problems in the early stages of the disease. Talk to the doctor before starting any medicine. Medicines provide treatment for symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease, but do not cure the condition.

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Learn more about your health care.
In later stages of disease, memory and behavioral changes become more prominent. The person loses their abilities to perform their usual activities. Eventually, the person is not able to do tasks such as eating, dressing and bathing. He or she may become anxious or violent, or wander away from the home. As the disease progresses, the person will need 24 hour care.

Most people live 8 to 12 years after symptoms become obvious. The most common cause of death in people with Alzheimer’s disease is infection or the inability to swallow.

The Alzheimer’s Association provides caregiver education and support groups and has a Safe Return Program to help persons with AD who wander away or get lost. Participation in research is critical to find better treatments.

For more information, contact these organizations:

- Alzheimer’s Association, [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org), 1-800-272-3900
- Alzheimer’s Disease Education and Referral Center (ADEAR), [www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers](http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers), 1-800-438-4380
- Eldercare Locator, [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov), 1-800-677-1116
- Family Caregiver Alliance, [www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org), 1-800-445-8106
- National Family Caregivers Association, [www.thefamilycaregiver.org](http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org), 1-800-896-3650
- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov), 1-866-615-6464
- National Respite Network and Resource Center, [www.archrespite.org](http://www.archrespite.org)

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.