



Alzheimer's Disease (AD)

Signs & Symptoms

Alzheimer's disease has a gradual onset. How quickly signs and symptoms occur and progress varies from person to person. The average time span is about 3 to 6 years after symptoms start. Survival can be as long as 20 years.

The Alzheimer's Association gives these 10 symptoms for AD:

- **Memory changes that disrupt daily life.** Persons with AD forget important dates, events, and/or information. They may also ask the same question over and over.
- **Problems doing familiar tasks.** Persons with AD may have a hard time fixing a meal or driving to a familiar place.
- **New problems speaking or writing.** Persons with AD often forget simple words or phrases or use unusual words for things. An example is calling a toothbrush "that thing for my mouth."
- **Problems with visual images and spatial relationships.** Persons may have problems with reading, color and contrast, and judging distance.
- **Problems with planning and/or solving problems.** Persons with AD have trouble making and following plans. They have trouble working with numbers, such as balancing a checkbook.
- **Problems with awareness of time and place.** Persons with AD may forget where they are, how they got there, and how to get back home. They may lose track of dates and seasons.
- **Poor or decreased judgment.** Persons with AD neglect daily grooming and may not dress right for the weather. They show poor judgment about money.
- **Misplacing things.** Persons with AD lose things and can not retrace their steps to find them. They put things in unusual places, such as a wristwatch in a sugar bowl.
- **Changes in mood or personality.** Persons with AD can get very confused, depressed, fearful, and worried. They rely on someone else to make decisions for them.
- **Withdrawal from social activities and work.** Persons with AD get less involved with hobbies, social events, sports, and work.

About 5.3 million persons in the U.S. have Alzheimer's disease (AD). It is the most common cause of dementia – a broad term that means cognitive function declines enough to interfere with daily life activities. Nearly half of people age 85 and older may have AD, but it is not a normal part of aging.

Causes

With AD, certain protein deposits (plaques) and twisted fibers (tangles) build up in the brain. Over time, this causes large numbers of nerve cells in the brain to die.

Risk factors for AD are getting older and a family history of the disease. Having heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, a stroke, or a brain injury may increase the risk. Staying physically and mentally active and eating healthy throughout life may lower the risk for AD.



Alzheimer's Disease (AD), Continued

Treatment

A medical diagnosis suggests (or rules out) Alzheimer's disease. Other conditions, such as depression, a severe lack of vitamin B₁₂, and blood clots in the brain can cause symptoms like AD. So can side effects of some medicines.

There is no known cure for Alzheimer's disease.

Prescribed medicines may help some persons with mild to moderate AD.

Questions to Ask

Is the person suddenly confused or disoriented? Is he or she not able to reason or communicate at all?

YES



NO

Are any of the **signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease** listed on previous page present?

YES



NO

Are any of these conditions present?

- Symptoms in a person with Alzheimer's disease worsen.
- The caretaker of the person with Alzheimer's disease needs care or guidance.

YES



NO

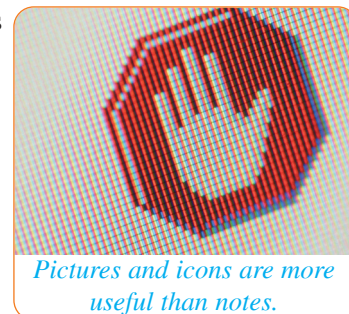


Self-Care / Prevention

There is no known prevention. Studies are being done to find out ways to lower the risk of AD and delay the onset of symptoms. Some studies suggest to do things that keep the mind active. This includes crossword puzzles and reading.

Good planning, medical care, and social management help both the person and caregivers cope with symptoms and maintain the quality of life for as long as possible. An **Advance Directive** (see at www.HealthyLearn.com) should be done in the early stages of AD to allow for the person's wishes. It's very helpful to put structure in the life of the person in the early stages of AD. To do this:

- Maintain daily routines.
- See that the person with AD eats well-balanced meals and stays as active as he or she can. Activities like going for walks with others are good.
- Post safety signs like "Don't touch." Make "to do" lists of daily tasks.
- Put things in their proper places after use. This helps the person find things when he or she needs them.
- Make sure the person carries identification or wears a medical ID bracelet.



Get more information from:

HealthyLearn®

www.HealthyLearn.com

Alzheimer's Disease Education & Referral (ADEAR) Center

800.438.4380 • www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers

Alzheimer's Association

800.272.3900 • www.alz.org