Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease is a disorder that affects the cells and nerve endings in the brain and interferes with the ability to remember, reason, think, and understand.

It gets worse over time and, in the late stages, can include loss of physical functions. It is NOT a normal part of aging or something that is expected to happen later in life.

It affects 2 to 4 percent of persons over age 65; however, people in their 40s and 50s can also develop Alzheimer's disease.

Causes

The cause of Alzheimer's is still unknown.

Diagnosis

There is no simple medical test to identify Alzheimer's disease. It is diagnosed by ruling out other disorders. There are many problems that produce symptoms that are similar to Alzheimer's disease. Many times another cause is found that can be treated.

Symptoms

Alzheimer's disease usually starts slowly.

Early symptoms include:

- Problems remembering things
- Difficulty paying attention
- Poor judgment; may keep driving though no longer able
- Problems managing money
- Difficulty finding the right words to express self
- Changing moods
- As the disease gets worse, symptoms may include:
    - Severe disorientation; may no longer recognize home
    - Severe memory loss; may no longer remember being married
    - Severe problems expressing self or understanding others
    - Wandering
    - Severe anxiety
    - Inability to complete routine household tasks to include personal hygiene

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Treatment

Currently there is no cure or way to prevent Alzheimer's disease. There are ways to improve the lives of people with the disease:

- Learn all you can about the disease. Check with your library, aging agencies, and Alzheimer's organizations.
- Do not do it alone. Talk to your family and friends. Contact your local area Agency on Aging for information on support groups and professional services in your area.
- Keep your expectations realistic - focus on what your loved one can do and learn to cope with the losses.
- Be flexible - learn to enjoy the good days and make the best of the bad.
- Remember, no one is perfect.
- Don't wait to make plans - medical, financial, legal - this disease will not wait until you and your loved one are ready.