
Alzheimer Disease

Alzheimer disease is a brain illness that usually occurs in older adults. But it can also happen as early as age 40. It's the most common cause of dementia and is a progressive disease. This means it gets worse over time.

What is Alzheimer disease?

Alzheimer disease causes a series of changes to nerves of the brain. Some nerves form into clumps and tangles, and lose some of their connections to other nerves.

Healthcare providers don't fully understand what causes Alzheimer disease. But they think these may be some of the causes:

- Age and family history
- Certain genes
- Abnormal protein deposits in the brain
- Environmental factors
- Problems with a person's immune system
- Possibly infections

Symptoms of Alzheimer disease

The disease causes changes in behavior and thinking known as dementia. The symptoms include:

- Memory loss
- Confusion
- Restlessness
- Personality and behavior changes
- Problems with judgment
- Problems communicating with others
- Inability to follow directions
- Lack of emotion
- Aggression, hallucinations, and delusions

Diagnosing Alzheimer disease

No single test is able to diagnose Alzheimer disease. Instead, healthcare providers use a series of tests to rule out other health conditions. The tests may include:

- **A complete health history.** This may include questions about overall health and past health problems. The healthcare provider may ask how well the person can do daily tasks. The healthcare provider may ask family or close friends about any changes in behavior or personality.
- **Mental status test.** This is a test of memory, problem solving, attention, counting, and language.
- **Standard medical tests.** These may include blood and urine tests to find possible causes for the problem.
- **Brain imaging tests.** CT, MRI, or positron emission tomography (PET) may be used to rule out other causes of the problem.
- **Neuropsychological testing.** These are more advanced tests of memory and other brain functions that can determine the extent of brain dysfunction.

Treating Alzheimer disease

Alzheimer disease has no cure. Instead healthcare providers can help ease some symptoms. This can make a person with Alzheimer more comfortable. Treatment can also make it easier for their caregivers to take care of them.

Some medicines may help slow the decline of a person's memory, thinking, and language skills. They may help with problems of behavior, such as aggression. They can lessen hallucinations and delusions. These medicines can work for some but not all people. And they may help for only a limited time. Medicines include:

- Donepezil
- Galantamine
- Rivastigmine
- Memantine

In some cases, behavior problems can be caused by medicine side effects. Talk with the person's healthcare provider about all medicines they are taking. Never increase or decrease a person's medicines unless you talk with the provider. Never share medicines or use someone else's prescriptions. If you have trouble paying for the prescriptions, talk to the provider or the pharmacist about how to get help with this.

Keeping healthy

For a person with Alzheimer, it's important to stay healthy. Good nutrition and physical and social activity are vital. A calm and well-structured environment will help. Make sure to keep up with healthcare appointments and managing other health conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Some people benefit from having a nutritionist help to prevent weight loss.

Caring for someone with Alzheimer

A person with Alzheimer will need more caregiving over time. Talk with your healthcare provider about caregiving resources.

To learn more

- [Alzheimer's Association](#), 800-272-3900
- [National Institute on Aging](#), 800-222-2225
- [Alzheimer's Foundation of America](#), 866-232-8484