

Alzheimer's Disease

FACT SHEET



Did you know that Alzheimer's Disease

Is a progressive and fatal disease of the brain? Alzheimer's affects over 5 million Americans and is the seventh leading cause of death in America. Alzheimer's disease destroys brain cells causing problems with memory, and thinking, as well as causing behavior problems severe enough to affect work, social functioning and activities of daily living. Alzheimer's is often associated with dementia which causes memory loss. There is no known cure for Alzheimer's disease.

Could be caused by

- A family history of the disorder
- A result of increasing age (most people with Alzheimer's are 65 years and older)
- Plaques and tangles in and between brain cells which block communication causing the nerve cells to die

Symptoms

- Poor or impaired judgment
- Memory loss
- Confusion
- Difficulty with speaking and performing familiar tasks
- Disoriented to time and place
- Problems with abstract thinking
- Changes in personality
- Loss of initiative
- Misplacing important things

Quick tips for helping people with these symptoms of Mental Illness

- Always acknowledge what the person is saying. Do not discount their emotions. On the other hand, do not enter into a "therapy session." Keep the boundaries firm and the purpose of the conversation clear for persons who are anxious, confused, have difficulty speaking and do not remember what you are talking about.
- Help focus the person on the topic of the counseling session. (If it is possible), try to gently bring the topic of conversation back to the purpose of the counseling session if a person is distracted and talking about another topic.
- Find a quiet room to talk with the person who may be confused or easily distracted, has difficulty speaking, is disoriented to time and place and has impaired attention.
- Try to understand the feelings of others and be patient. Speak slowly and repeat information for persons who are easily distracted and not concentrating. Speak in a calm and positive tone to decrease anxiety.
- Convey interest and concern towards the person. Reassure the person that you are there to help and you care. You could say, "You are not alone in this. I am here for you."
- When explaining complex topics, speak in short, simple and logical sentences. For example, use concise and concrete words and introduce one topic at a time if the person is easily distracted, repeating sentences or words, and has impaired attention or memory.
- Write down important facts in logical order and repeat if necessary to the person. Give the person a list of the important facts that were discussed and the decisions that were made.
- To conclude the session, summarize what you discussed with the person during the session. Ask if there are questions. If there are no questions, gently but firmly tell the person the session is ended. You can also stand up as a signal to the beneficiary that the session is ended.

Additional tips for helping people with symptoms of Mental Illness

If the person is starting to exhibit unusual behavior (such as getting up and wandering around the room or extreme confusion) speak softly, in simple sentences and direct the person back to his/her chair. Reassure the person that together you can work through the issues. If the person does not stop the unusual behavior or threatens to take his/her life or hurt him/herself or others do the following:

- ◇ Use your own judgment regarding your personal safety.
 - ◇ Stop the session using established protocol your office has developed. You can call your supervisor immediately without alarming the person.
 - ◇ Give some distance between the person and yourself.
 - ◇ Do not leave the person alone until someone has arrived in the room.
 - ◇ Do not criticize or threaten the person.
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Resources

Web Sources:

- The Alzheimer's Association - www.alz.org
- The National Institute of Mental Health - www.nimh.nih.gov
- Healthy Minds (APA) - www.healthyminds.org
- National Institute on Aging - www.nia.nih.gov
- National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke - <http://www.ninds.nih.gov/index.htm>

Publications:

- Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center (ADEAR) - <http://www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/Publications>
- Mental Health America - www.mentalhealthamerica.net
- Medline Plus - <http://medlineplus.gov>
- Connecticut Network of Care - <http://connecticut.networkofcare.org>