

**Alzheimer's from A to Z:
Memory Loss, Dementia,
and the Basics of
Alzheimer's Disease**

**Satellite Conference and Live Webcast
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Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health
Distance Learning and Telehealth Division

Faculty

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the basics

memory loss, dementia
and alzheimer's disease

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Typical changes

- Typical age-related changes involve:
 - Making a bad decision once in a while
 - Missing an occasional monthly payment
 - Forgetting which day it is and remembering later
 - Sometimes forgetting which word to use
 - Losing things from time to time

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Problematic changes

1. Memory changes that disrupt daily life
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks
4. Confusion with time or place
5. Trouble with visual images and spatial relationships
6. New problems with words in speaking or writing
7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps
8. Decreased or poor judgment
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities
10. Changes in mood and personality

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What is dementia?

- Loss of cognitive functioning serious enough to interfere with daily functioning
- Causes changes in:
 - Memory
 - Language
 - Thought
 - Navigation
 - Behavior
 - Personality/Mood
 - Planning and Organizing

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Reversible diseases that mimic dementia

- Emotional disorders
- Metabolic disorders (e.g., hypothyroidism)
- Brain tumors
- Dehydration
- Emotional disorders
- Sensory loss
- Vitamin deficiencies (e.g., B12 deficiency)
- Infections
- Alcohol, drugs, medication interactions

Understanding dementia

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    graph TD
      Dementia --> Alzheimer's_disease[Alzheimer's disease]
      Dementia --> Vascular_dementia[Vascular dementia]
      Dementia --> Mixed_dementia[Mixed dementia]
      Dementia --> Dementia_with_Lewy_bodies[Dementia with Lewy bodies]
      Dementia --> Frontotemporal_lobar_degeneration[Frontotemporal lobar degeneration]
    
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More rare types of brain disorders

Other more rare dementias:

- Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease
- Parkinson's disease
- Huntington's disease
- Normal pressure hydrocephalus
- Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome

Visual processing disorders related to dementia:

- Posterior Cortical Atrophy
- Cortical Visual Impairment

Mild Cognitive Impairment

- Severe enough to show up on tests
- Not severe enough to affect daily life
- Increases risk of developing Alzheimer's disease

What is Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's disease:

- is a brain disorder
- is a progressive disease
- is the most common form of dementia
- has no cure
- is eventually fatal
- affects over 5 million Americans

How the brain works

- There are 100 billion nerve cells, or neurons, creating a branching network.
- Signals traveling through the neuron forest form memories, thoughts and feelings
- Alzheimer's disease destroys neurons

Which functions are affected?

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Healthy vs. Alzheimer's brain

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Major risk factors

- The primary risk factor is age
- The incidence is higher in women largely due to women living longer
- Down syndrome is correlated with Alzheimer's
- Family history can increase risk
- There are two categories of genes

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Selecting a Doctor

- Doctors can diagnosis Alzheimer's disease with accuracy
- Start with:
 - A physician who is experienced with diagnosing Alzheimer's
- Then consult the following as needed:
 - Geriatrician
 - Neurologist
 - Psychiatrist
 - Neuropsychologist

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Preparing for the doctor's visit

- Keep a log
 - Write a list of symptoms, be specific
 - Include when, how often and where
 - Develop the list with input from other family members
- List current and previous health problems
- Bring all medication (prescriptions, vitamins, herbal supplements and over the counter medication)

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Steps in the assessment

1. Medical history
2. Mental status evaluation
3. Series of evaluations that test memory, reasoning, visual-motor coordination and language skills
4. Physical examination, which includes:
 - Evaluating blood pressure, nutrition and pulse
 - Testing nervous system functions like sensation and balance
 - A brain scan to rule out a stroke
 - Lab tests to rule out other disorders
5. Psychiatric evaluation, to rule out emotional causes of symptoms
6. Interviews with family to get more information about changes

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When the diagnosis is Alzheimer's disease...

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Encourage basics

Emotions run high

shock

fear

grief

anger

denial

confusion

worry

acceptance

relief

guilt

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Encourage basics

Stages of Alzheimer's disease

- **Early Stage (Mild Alzheimer's)**
 - Recent memory loss
 - Difficulty managing money, driving, or handling social situations
- **Middle Stage (Moderate Alzheimer's)**
 - Difficulty with language
 - Problems keeping track of personal items
 - May need help with grooming
- **Late Stage (Severe Alzheimer's)**
 - Long- and short-term memory affected
 - Needs care around the clock

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Encourage basics

Plan early

- Be an active partner in long-term care plan
- Develop a relationship with your healthcare team
- Get legal and financial issues in order
- Grow a support system
- Educate yourself about the disease

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Encourage basics

Medications to treat symptoms

- Cholinesterase inhibitors for mild to moderate symptoms
 - Donepezil (Aricept®)
 - Rivastigmine (Exelon®)
 - Galantamine (Razadyne®)
- NMDA receptor antagonist (glutamate regulator) for moderate to severe symptoms
 - Memantine (Namenda®)

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Encourage basics

Clinical research studies

- Clinical trials fuel progress toward treatments
- Participants receive a high standard of care

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Contact us - we can help

alz.org®

- Alzheimer's Navigator
- Community Resource Finder
- ALZConnected
- Alzheimer's and Dementia Caregiver Center
- Safety Center

800.272.3900

- 24/7 Helpline – Available all day every day

alz.org/findus

- Support groups, education programs and more available in communities nationwide

training.alz.org

- Free online education programs available at training.alz.org

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Get involved

WALK TO END ALZHEIMER'S

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