



SENIOR HEALTH

Alzheimer's Disease

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

With Alzheimer's disease, one of the most common forms of dementia, memory, reason, judgment, language and mental ability are eventually destroyed when nerve cells in the brain, called neurons, degenerate and die. The brain can't replace the nerve cells, so brain function is lost.

Scientists and researchers still don't know why Alzheimer's disease occurs. Although age and heredity are two proven risk factors, Alzheimer's disease is thought to be the result of a combination of elements. Diagnosis is made by careful examination of the symptoms and by eliminating other causes.

SYMPTOMS OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

short attention span

gradual loss of memory

inability to learn

decreased bowel or bladder control

depression

disorientation/confusion

forgetfulness

inability to handle minor tasks

irritability or hostile behavior

paranoia

lack of spontaneity

neglecting to perform routine tasks

OLDER WOMEN AND ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Some research has shown that women who use estrogen replacement after menopause may be reducing their risk for Alzheimer's disease by as much as 40 percent. Estrogen replacement therapy has been shown to improve mental ability and memory.

WORK YOUR BRAIN

Keeping your mind mentally fit may help delay the onset of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease. Mental exercises and learning seem to promote the growth of additional synapses in the brain (the connections between neurons).

HOW ALZHEIMER'S IS TREATED

At-home care during the early stages should be undertaken only under the supervision of a doctor. Some medications, such as anti-depressants, mild sedatives or antipsychotic drugs, may be used in low doses to help control behavior. Physical therapy, simple directions for routine activities and clear communication from caregivers can often help. Environmental cues, such as clocks, calendars and familiar objects, can help the patient with orientation.