



The Senior Alliance - Area Agency on Aging 1-C

3850 Second Street, Suite 201, Wayne, MI 48184
(734) 722-2830 • (800) 815-1112 • Fax: (734) 722-2836
Web site: www.aaa1c.org • Email: info@tsalink.org

Alzheimer's Disease

What is it? What should I do? Is there any support?

By Jean Barnas
Alzheimer's Association
Greater Michigan Chapter

Alzheimer's disease (AD), the most common form of dementia, is a progressive degenerative disease that attacks the brain, resulting in impaired memory, thinking and behavior. Close to 5 million are afflicted with AD in the U.S., taking more than 100,000 lives annually. It is projected that 14 million Americans will have Alzheimer's or a related disorder by the year 2050 if no cure is found. No one knows yet exactly what causes Alzheimer's disease. Researchers are learning about what happens to the brain as we grow older, what happens to brain cells in Alzheimer's disease and the genes associated with Alzheimer's, and many other factors that may be important.

What are the symptoms? In most cases, one of the first signs is short-term memory loss. Confusion and personality changes also characterize the early stages of AD. As the disease progresses, a person may lose the ability to perform routine tasks, such as driving or balancing a checkbook. Judgment, concentration, orientation and speech also become impaired. In later stages, the ability to recognize family members and familiar surroundings is affected, and eventually patients lose all mental and physical abilities.

Early diagnosis is important because treatment may be more effective in the earlier stages. Early diagnosis also allows the person with AD to participate in care decision. In addition, other reversible causes, which can be readily treated, may produce Alzheimer-type symptoms.

What treatment is available? We do not know the cause and do not yet have a cure for Alzheimer's. However, there are medications currently available that may slow the progression of the disease. Caregivers should take their loved ones for a comprehensive medical exam, including physical, neurological, psychiatric, and laboratory testing, to determine treatment options.



The Alzheimer's Association recommends that people interested in healthy aging pursue an active approach to "Maintain Your Brain.™"

Be aware of progress and hope. It's important to understand how much has been accomplished in the fight against Alzheimer's disease and why there is hope. Most of what we know about Alzheimer's disease we have learned in the past 15 years. During this exciting time, medical researchers have uncovered numerous secrets of Alzheimer's; in many ways, the disease is no longer a mystery. But we still have much to learn until the Association's vision of a world without Alzheimer's will be achieved. In the meantime, there is reason to be hopeful. Through the efforts of the National Institute on Aging; America's network of Alzheimer's Disease Centers; the Alzheimer's Association; and pharmaceutical companies and medical researchers worldwide, we're making progress in understanding how to treat Alzheimer's and to prevent or delay its onset.

Take care of your brain. The Alzheimer's Association believes it is important for Americans to understand that healthy aging is a process that should begin sooner in life rather than later to remain healthy of body and mind for as long as possible. More research is necessary, especially through prevention trials, but increasing evidence suggests that what's good for the heart is good for the brain. Eating a healthy diet, getting more physical activity and managing your

numbers – your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels, as well as your body weight – contribute to healthier aging and may also decrease your risk for Alzheimer's.

The Alzheimer's Association - Greater Michigan Chapter is composed of families, healthcare professionals, and concerned community leaders that are part of the national Alzheimer's Association. The Detroit Area Region office provides the following services:



- **Telephone Helpline:** Callers can receive support, obtain referrals and gain valuable information from trained, experienced volunteers, anytime - day or night.
- **Counseling/Care Management:** The Counseling and Care Management program offers free comprehensive assistance with solving problems, gathering information, and choosing care options. Call the Helpline to make an appointment.
- **Education and Training:** Speakers and informational literature is available to community groups. Professional training is provided to family caregivers and healthcare professionals. Monthly educational workshops are offered.
- **Family Support Groups:** Monthly meetings are held free of charge throughout Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, St. Clair, Huron and Sanilac counties. They provide an opportunity for discussion, sharing, and information. Specialty groups include: Bilingual Spanish/English, Men's Informational meetings, Gay and Lesbian Caregivers, "Kids Korner," and "Transitions" for caregivers coping with late stage issues.
- **Patient Support Groups:** Designed for patients who are in the early stages of the disease. Sessions provide an opportunity to discuss the emotional aspects of coping, to share feelings, and obtain information.
- **Helping Hands - Group Respite (Adult Day Services):** Services to individuals afflicted with AD and their families at three locations. Call to register for supervised, caring socialization and activities.
- **Helping Hands - In-Home Respite:** Offers trained care workers who provide respite care to persons afflicted with AD and their caregivers in their own home. Call for information.
- **Safe Return Wandering Program:** National identification program that assists in the safe and timely return of individuals with dementia who wander and become lost.
- **Promotion of Research/Autopsy Assistance:** The Alzheimer's Association provides financial support of medical research, and coordinates an autopsy program to assist families in arranging for an autopsy.

Alzheimer's Association - Greater Michigan Chapter

20300 Civic Center, Suite 100
Southfield, MI 48076

(248) 351-0280 • (800) 337-3827

alzheimer's  association

the compassion to care, the leadership to conquer

Ten Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease listed on the next page

Ten Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

Some change in memory is normal as we grow older, but the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease are more than simple lapses in memory. People with Alzheimer's experience difficulties communicating, learning, thinking, and reasoning – problems severe enough to have an impact on an individual's work, social activities, and family life.

The Alzheimer's Association believes that it is critical for people with dementia and their families to receive information, care, and support as early as possible. To help family members and healthcare professionals recognize warning signs of Alzheimer's disease, the Association has developed a checklist of common symptoms.

1. Memory loss
2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks
3. Problems with language
4. Disorientation to time and place
5. Poor or decreased judgment
6. Problems with abstract thinking
7. Misplacing things
8. Changes in mood or behavior
9. Changes in personality
10. Loss of initiative

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