

## ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

The American Academy of Neurology developed guidelines that summarize the best research on recognizing, diagnosing, and providing treatment options for people with Alzheimer's disease and their families. These guidelines will help provide the best care possible. You can use this summary version to learn more about:

- How you can recognize Alzheimer's disease
- How your doctor will diagnose Alzheimer's disease
- What treatment and care options are available today
- Where you can find more resources

### How Can You Recognize Alzheimer's Disease?

**Alzheimer's disease is different from normal aging.** The symptoms of Alzheimer's disease involve more than simple lapses in memory. People with Alzheimer's experience difficulties in communicating, learning, thinking, and reasoning that can have an impact on a person's work and social and family life. Alzheimer's is a disease that destroys brain cells — which is not a normal part of aging.

**The 10 most common warning signs of Alzheimer's disease** are included in this summary. If you or someone you know has these symptoms, you should see a doctor for a complete examination.

### How Does A Doctor Diagnose Alzheimer's Disease?

**Alzheimer's disease can be reliably diagnosed** with a complete examination that includes:

- A complete medical and psychiatric history
- A neurological exam
- Lab tests to rule out anemia, vitamin deficiencies, and other conditions
- A mental status exam to evaluate the person's thinking and memory
- Talking with family members or caregivers

**You can help your physician** by being prepared for the appointment. Bring a list of current medications, a log of symptoms or behavior changes and a list of your questions or concerns. It is also helpful to provide an accurate history of the person's medical conditions and any previous treatment.

### What Are The Treatment And Care Options Available Today?

**Medications are available that help certain symptoms.** These are called “cholinesterase inhibitors.” They may improve quality of life and cognitive functions including memory, thought, and reasoning. Medication works most effectively for people who are mildly to moderately affected by the disease. Therefore, the early recognition and diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease is very important. However, medications do not reverse or change the progression of the disease.

Research shows that Vitamin E is also an option to help with some symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. Vitamin E is an antioxidant, and it may aid in the breakdown of free radicals that may be damaging brain cells in individuals with Alzheimer's disease. Selegiline is another antioxidant that may help with some symptoms of the disease.

While a cure for Alzheimer's disease is not yet available, research continues for new treatment options.

**Changes in activities and medications improve behavior.** A person with Alzheimer's disease may display behavior problems such as paranoia, suspiciousness, combativeness, or resistance to maintaining personal hygiene. These behavioral problems can seem overwhelming to families and caregivers. Your physician may suggest various strategies to assist in daily caregiving tasks including:

- Walking or other light exercise that helps reduce problem behaviors
- Playing music, particularly during meals and bathing
- Providing a predictable routine for daily activities, including toileting



- Practicing various skills and positive reinforcement that increase independence
- Considering the medications available to help depression, agitation and psychosis

**Caregiver educational programs can delay the time to nursing home placement** for the person with Alzheimer's. Caregivers can find out more about educational programs by contacting their local Alzheimer's Association. Support groups are also available which help improve the well-being of the caregiver, as well as the person with Alzheimer's disease.

### Where Can You Find More Resources?

More information is available through your local Alzheimer's Association or your physician.

#### Find Local Patient Information

Alzheimer's Association  
Phone: 1-800-272-3900  
[www.alz.org/chapter](http://www.alz.org/chapter)

#### Find A Neurologist

American Academy of Neurology  
[www.aan.com](http://www.aan.com)

## THE 10 WARNING SIGNS OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

The Alzheimer's Association has developed a list of warning signs that include common symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. Individuals who exhibit several of these symptoms should see a physician for a complete examination.

1. Memory loss that affects job skills. It's normal to occasionally forget an assignment, deadline, or colleague's name, but frequent forgetfulness or unexplainable confusion at home or in the workplace may signal that something's wrong.
2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks. Busy people get distracted from time to time. For example, you might leave something on the stove too long or not remember to serve part of a meal. People with Alzheimer's might prepare a meal and not only forget to serve it but also forget they made it.
3. Problems with language. Everyone has trouble finding the right word sometimes, but a person with Alzheimer's disease may forget simple words or substitute inappropriate words, making his or her sentences difficult to understand.
4. Disorientation to time and place. It's normal to momentarily forget the day of the week or what you need from the store. But people with Alzheimer's disease can become lost on their own street, not knowing where they are, how they got there, or how to get back home.
5. Poor or decreased judgment. Choosing not to bring a sweater or coat along on a chilly night is a common mistake. A person with Alzheimer's, however, may dress inappropriately in more noticeable ways, wearing a bathrobe to the store or several blouses on a hot day.
6. Problems with abstract thinking. Balancing a checkbook can be challenging for many people, but for someone with Alzheimer's, recognizing numbers or performing basic calculation may be impossible.
7. Misplacing things. Everyone temporarily misplaces a wallet or keys from time to time. A person with Alzheimer's disease may put these and other items in inappropriate places — such as an iron in the freezer or a wristwatch in the sugar bowl — and then not recall how they got there.
8. Changes in mood or behavior. Everyone experiences a broad range of emotions — it's part of being human. People with Alzheimer's tend to exhibit more rapid mood swings for no apparent reason.
9. Changes in personality. People's personalities may change somewhat as they age. But a person with Alzheimer's can change dramatically, either suddenly or over a period of time. Someone who is generally easygoing may become angry, suspicious, or fearful.
10. Loss of initiative. It's normal to tire of housework, business activities, or social obligations, but most people retain or eventually regain their interest. The person with Alzheimer's disease may remain uninterested and uninvolved in many or all of his usual pursuits.

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This is an evidence-based educational service of the American Academy of Neurology. It is designed to provide members with evidence-based guideline recommendations to assist with decision-making in patient care. It is based on an assessment of current scientific and clinical information, and is not intended to exclude any reasonable alternative methodologies. The AAN recognizes that specific patient care decisions are the prerogative of the patient and the physician caring for the patient, based on the circumstances involved. Physicians are encouraged to carefully review the full AAN guidelines so they understand all recommendations associated with care of these patients.



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