

Alzheimer Groupe Inc.
Presentation - McGill Telehealth Program
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Alzheimer Disease (AD) is a form of dementia. It is a progressive degeneration of the brain, which accounts for 80% of all Dementias. The ability for the brain to transmit messages from one neuron to another becomes impaired. Because the disease cannot be confirmed with certainty until after death, it is often called Alzheimer-type dementia, dementia being a term used to describe problems with memory and other mental functions. Alzheimer's Disease is not a part of normal aging.

Persons with related dementias display many of the same symptoms as Alzheimer persons (multi-infarct or vascular dementia, Parkinson's Disease, Huntington's Disease and frontal lobe dementia).

Estimates about the number of persons who have Alzheimer's Disease vary greatly. Generally it is thought that it affects about approximately 375,000 people in Canada and possibly two million or more people in the United States.

- Women are more affected by the disease than men.
- Over 52% of Canadians know someone with Alzheimer Disease and almost ¼ have someone affected in their family.
- Early in the next century, baby boomers will move into the age of highest risk of Alzheimer Disease by virtue of their numbers and longevity
- By the year 2031, it is estimated over ¾ million Canadians will have Alzheimer Disease and related dementias.

Generally Alzheimer victims range from the mid-sixties upwards. Early age onset Alzheimer's can affect people upwards of fifty. The disease tends to progress more rapidly with early onset.

The course of Alzheimer's Disease is roughly 8-12 years.

AD Versus Normal Aging

Someone with AD

Someone with normal age-related memory changes

Forgets entire experiences	Forgets part of an experience
Rarely remembers later	Often remembers later
Is gradually unable to follow written/spoken directions	Is usually able to follow written/spoken directions
Is gradually unable to use notes as reminders	Is usually able to use notes as reminders

Who Gets AD?

There are two types of AD:

Familial: accounts for about 10 % of cases

Sporadic: 90% of cases

There is a type of Alzheimer's which is genetic, that is, it runs in families, and can affect people as young as their thirties or even twenties but this is rare.

Alzheimer's Disease is often called the cruelest of diseases because first it attacks the mind then ravages the body.

What causes AD?

The cause of Alzheimer's Disease is unknown. There is no cure. However, there are medications currently available, which slow down the process of the disease.

A lot of research has been done to try to prove or disprove what may be the cause of AD. These research studies include:

- Aluminum
- Vitamins (Vitamin E)
- Herbal Supplements
- Antiperspirants
- AD linked to diabetes, high levels of cholesterol...
- Environment

Most of the findings are inconclusive, however research in this area is ongoing.

Symptoms may develop gradually and go unnoticed for 2-4 years. If you do notice several symptoms in the list below, the person with the symptoms should see a doctor for a complete examination.

1. *Memory for recent events.*
2. *Carrying out tasks with multiple steps.*
3. *Decision-making and problem-solving*
4. *Spatial ability and orientation*
5. *Language*
6. *Behavior and/or mood*

The progression through the disease is gradual. The following changes will vary from person to person over a period of time. Not everyone will experience all these changes; Alzheimer's affects each person in a unique way and at a different rate of progression. A great many people do not survive to the last stages of Alzheimer's, particularly the elderly who have other health complications or may succumb to pneumonia.

Through the progression of the disease, there is every reason to believe that a person's emotional memory remains. One should never assume that the Alzheimer person is no longer able to give love and to receive love. Communication is possible, even in the very last stage, through the senses, by touch, by the voice, with music and with motion.

Stages of AD

Every expert has their own definitions of the stages of Alzheimer Disease. Here's how they describe them:

3 Stages of AD

1. **The Early Stage**
 - Recent memory loss begins to affect job performance
 - Confusion about places
 - Loses initiative
 - Mood/personality changes, avoids people
 - Takes longer with routine chores
 - Makes bad decisions
 - Trouble with handling money, paying bills
2. **The Middle Stage**
 - Increasing memory loss and confusion
 - Problems recognizing close friends
 - Repetitive statements
 - Occasional muscle twitches or jerking

- Motor problems
- Problems with reading, writing and numbers
- Difficulty in thinking logically
- Can't find right words
- May be suspicious, irritable, fidgety, teary
- Loss of impulse control, refusal to bathe, has trouble dressing
- May see or hear things that are not there
- Needs supervision

3. Late Stage

- Loses weight
- Can't recognize family members or image of self in mirror
- Unable to care for self
- Can't communicate
- May put everything in mouth, touch everything
- Can't control bowels, bladder
- May have seizures, difficulty with swallowing, skin infections

Medication

Four drugs are available in Canada to treat symptoms in people with Alzheimer's disease -- Aricept™, Exelon™, Remyntal™ and Ebixa® (memantine hydrochloride)

For more information, please speak with your family doctor.

Communication and Alzheimers Disease

Getting a message across:

- **Set the stage**
- **Get the person's attention**
- **Make eye contact**
- **Speak slowly and clearly**
- **Give one message at a time**
- **Pay attention**
- **Repeat important information**
- **Show and talk**
- **Take time**

Where can we get help?

1. See your family Doctor

2. Talk to a professional

Alzheimer Groupe Inc.

(514) 485-7233 Help line open weekdays

Call the Alzheimer Society of Canada

Toll-free: 1-800-616-8816 (valid only in Canada)

3. Community Services (which offers help after a diagnosis)

a) Respite programs

b) Day programs

c) Volunteer services

d) Get a social worker from community agency (CSSS/CLSC)

e) Support groups