

November is National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month

Approximately 4.5 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease (pronounced *AHLZ-hi-merz*) disease. Alzheimer's disease (AD) is one of several disorders that cause the gradual loss of brain cells. Common symptoms include a loss of memory, problems with reasoning or judgment, disorientation, difficulty in learning new information, loss of language skills, and decline in the ability to perform routine tasks. Some change in memory is normal as we grow older; however people with Alzheimer's disease experience difficulties severe enough to have an impact on work, social activities, and family life.

To help family members recognize warning signs of Alzheimer's disease, the Association has developed a **checklist** of common symptoms.

1. Memory loss. One of the most common early signs of dementia is forgetting recently learned information.

2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks. People with dementia often find it hard to complete everyday tasks that are so familiar we usually do not think about how to do them.

3. Problems with language. A person with Alzheimer's disease often forgets simple words or substitutes unusual words, making his or her speech or writing hard to understand.

4. Disorientation to time and place. People with Alzheimer's disease can become lost on their own street, forget where they are and how they got there, and not know how to get back home.

5. Poor or decreased judgment. Those with Alzheimer's may dress without regard to the weather, wearing several shirts or blouses on a warm day or very little clothing in cold weather.

6. Problems with abstract thinking. Someone with Alzheimer's disease could forget what the numbers are, when balancing a checkbook, and what needs to be done with them.

7. Misplacing things. A person with Alzheimer's disease may put things in unusual places: an iron in the freezer or a wristwatch in the sugar bowl.

8. Changes in mood or behavior. Someone with Alzheimer's disease can show rapid mood swings—from calm to tears to anger—for no apparent reason.

9. Changes in personality. A person with Alzheimer's disease can change a lot, becoming extremely confused, suspicious, fearful, or dependent on a family member.

10. Loss of initiative. A person with Alzheimer's disease may become very passive, sitting in front of the television for hours, sleeping more than usual, or not wanting to do usual activities.

If you recognize any warning signs in yourself or a loved one, the Alzheimer's Association recommends consulting a physician. Early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or other disorders causing dementia is an important step in getting appropriate treatment, care, and support services. There is no cure for Alzheimer's disease. However, there are several drug treatments that may improve or stabilize symptoms and several care strategies and activities that may minimize or prevent behavioral problems.

Early diagnosis and treatment is important. For more information: on line www.alz.org or call 1-800-548-2111