



Alzheimer's Disease

Information for patients and families

UHN

What is Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's disease is a common disease that first affects your memory. As the disease gets worse, it affects other parts of your thinking such as your attention, planning, and language. It is the most common cause of dementia.

What are the symptoms?

People with Alzheimer's disease usually have trouble with their short-term memory.

For example, they might:

- forget things more often (like who they talked to or what they planned to do)
- repeat themselves
- misplace things

The disease gets worse over time. As it gets worse, people develop other thinking problems like:

- getting lost in familiar places
- having trouble doing regular daily activities such as:
 - paying bills or balancing a check book
 - cooking meals
 - remembering the right words to use when speaking
 - driving

When the disease becomes very bad, people may begin to lose their long-term memory.

Please visit the UHN Patient Education website for more health information: www.uhnpatienteducation.ca
© 2017 University Health Network. All rights reserved.
This information is to be used for informational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please consult your health care provider for advice about a specific medical condition. A single copy of these materials may be reprinted for non-commercial personal use only.

Author: Dr. David Tang-Wai and Carmela Tartaglia
Reviewed: 01/2017
Form: D-5424

What causes Alzheimer's disease?

When people have Alzheimer's disease, there is a buildup of proteins in their brains. This buildup of proteins (called amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles) causes your nerve cells to:

- have trouble communicating with each other
- die early

We don't know why this buildup happens.

What about safety?

Since Alzheimer's disease can affect things like your understanding of what is happening, ability to read or do regular tasks, safety is a concern. It can become unsafe for a person with Alzheimer's disease to drive, cook, follow instructions on their medicines, or make legal decisions.

Are there any treatments?

Right now, there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, but there are medicines and other treatments that can help. Using both medicine and other types of treatments together usually works best to keep Alzheimer's disease from getting worse too quickly. Some medicines that can help include:

- Donepezil
- Rivastigmine
- Galantamine
- Memantine

Other types of treatments include:

- doing more social and mental activities, such as taking part in community centres, playing games, or solving puzzles
- changing what you eat (eating a Mediterranean style diet can help)
- being more active and exercising more, such as going on brisk walks or joining a gym

It is also important to stay in good health. If you have diabetes, high blood pressure, and/or high cholesterol, these need to be managed well because these conditions can worsen dementia.