

Health Bulletin

Cooperative Extension Service

This publication compiled and edited by the H.E.E.L. Program
(Health Education through Extension Leadership) Staff

Alzheimer's Disease

*If wrinkles must be written upon our brows, let them not be written upon the heart.
The spirit should never grow old. James A. Garfield*

Have you ever walked into a room to do something and could not remember what it was that brought you to this room? Have you ever tried to tell someone a funny story only to forget an important point of the story?

These events happen to most of us at some time or another. Are we suffering from Alzheimer's disease or are we merely being forgetful for a minute or two? Based on the most current scientific thinking, these are not symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, but just a normal part of daily living in a very busy world.

Those suffering from the early stages of Alzheimer's disease have symptoms such as not remembering recent events, activities, or the names of familiar people or things. Scientists do not yet fully understand what causes AD. There probably is not one single cause, but several factors that affect each person differently. Age is the most important known risk factor for AD.

It is important to note, however, that AD is not a normal part of aging.

Although scientists are learning more every day, right now they still do not know what causes AD, and there is no cure. Factors of family history, genetics, diet, education and environment are being researched. Scientists think that as many as 4.5 million Americans suffer from AD. About five percent of men and women ages 65 to 74 have AD.

Some of the early symptoms of Alzheimer's disease are mild forgetfulness, difficulty recognizing familiar people or things, trouble remembering recent events, difficulty solving simple math problems, repeated behaviors such as folding items, hand washing and sleeplessness and wandering. Some later symptoms include complete loss of short and long term memory, severe confusion, unable to move without help and dependence on full-time care for daily living.

When thinking about preventing or delaying the onset of Alzheimer's disease, a first strategy is to check with your health care provider to determine what might be your best options. Antioxidants such as vitamins E and C protect the brain and may possibly play a role in preventing Alzheimer's disease. Estrogen and ginkgo biloba may help protect the brain from becoming worse. Supportive care from families or nursing professionals can improve quality of life.

Diagnosing Alzheimer's disease requires an examination from your physician to discern it from other forms of disorders. Some things your doctor might do to diagnose the disease include asking about personal and family history of medical problems, conducting a physical examination, performing tests for memory, problem solving, language, and concentration. Your physician may also conduct Alzheimer's disease medical tests such as blood and urine tests and brain scans.

While there is no known cure for Alzheimer's disease, there are some things we can do to improve our well being such as practicing good nutrition, enjoying our food, getting plenty of physical activity, working crossword puzzles, reading, connecting with family and friends, enjoying nature and remaining hopeful and positive about ourselves as we age with grace.

Check List for Good Brain Health

In the past week have you? :

- eaten salmon or other fatty fish at least 2 times
- eaten blueberries or other berries at least 3 times
- taken a multi vitamin and mineral supplement each day
- drank at least 8 glasses of water per day
- taken folic acid
- had at least 30 minutes of physical activity at least 5 times
- avoided smoking tobacco
- avoided being around tobacco smoke
- used the opposite hand to brush your teeth as you normally do
- worked a crossword puzzle or other brainteaser
- eaten beans at least two times
- had whole grains in your daily diet
- slept at least 8 hours every night
- read a newspaper for your news rather than watching television
- socialized with family or friends

“Quick Tips” for those who care for a person suffering with Alzheimer’s disease

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| Sleep at least 8 hours a night | Enjoy a glass of grape juice |
| Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables | Call an old friend |
| Drink at least 8 glasses of water a day | Offer to help a friend |
| Enjoy your family and friends | Be still |
| Get some physical activity everyday | Watch the squirrels and birds |
| Eat whole grains daily | Count your blessings |
| Smile more often | Breathe slowly and deeply |
| Ask for help when you need it | Relax your shoulders |
| Enjoy a hobby | Get a massage |
| Take a hike in the woods | Give a massage |
| Go swimming | Dance to the music |
| Take a child on an outing | Sing your song |
| Read a good book | Write a poem |
| Cook your favorite meal | Make a list of things for which you are grateful |
| Rent a good movie | Tell a joke |
| | Laugh |

Everyone is the age of their heart. Guatemalan Proverb
Youth is the gift of nature, but age is a work of art. Garson Kanin

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Sources:
 Alzheimer’s Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center
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 1-800-438-4380
 Website www.alzheimers.nia.nih.gov
 Alzheimer’s Association
 225 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1700
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For more information on health issues in Kentucky, please visit:
www.ca.uky.edu/HEEL

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