

# Alzheimer's Disease: *Getting the Facts*

## What is Alzheimer's Disease? *An Overview*

- Alzheimer's disease damages the brain. With time this damage becomes worse.
- AD is the most common form of dementia.
  - Dementia involves the loss of memory and thinking abilities.
- AD is not a normal part of aging.
- Approximately 4.5 million Americans have AD.

### What Are the Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease?

#### *Early Stages:*

- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty recognizing familiar people, things, or places
- Trouble remembering recent events
- Difficulty solving simple math problems
- Trouble performing well-known tasks
- Difficulty with communication

#### *Later Stages:*

- More loss of short-term and long-term memory
- Severe confusion
- Inability to safely walk alone
- Difficulty with simple movements such as swallowing or eating
- Dependence on full-time care for daily living



Photo by: Steve Patton and Matt Barton

### Causes of Alzheimer's Disease

- The cause is unknown, but researchers are investigating the role of heredity, environment, lifestyle, diet, and education.
- Age is the greatest factor, with the risk of developing AD doubling every five years after age 65.

## Prevention of Alzheimer's Disease

Check with your health care provider to determine what prevention strategies are best for you.

- While there is no cure, actions that may prevent, reduce, or slow AD include: brain exercises, positive thinking, being socially active, early diagnosis, and treatment.
- New medications are being tested.
- Antioxidants such as vitamin E and vitamin C may protect the brain and possibly prevent AD.
- Supportive care from families or nursing professionals can improve quality of life.
- Individuals with AD can live 8 to 20 years with proper care.

## Diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease

Examinations help distinguish AD from other forms of dementia. Your doctor might do the following

things to diagnose the disease:

- Ask about personal and family medical history
- Conduct a physical examination
- Perform tests for memory, problem solving, language, and concentration
- Conduct additional medical tests including an examination of blood and urine
- Perform brain scans

## Treatment for Alzheimer's Disease

There is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, but there are drugs available to treat the symptoms. The Food and Drug Administration has approved the following prescription drugs for people with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease:

- Aricept (donepezil)
- Exelon (rivastigmine)
- Reminyl (galantamine)

The drugs appear to slow some of the symptoms, but don't appear to stop the underlying progression of the disease.

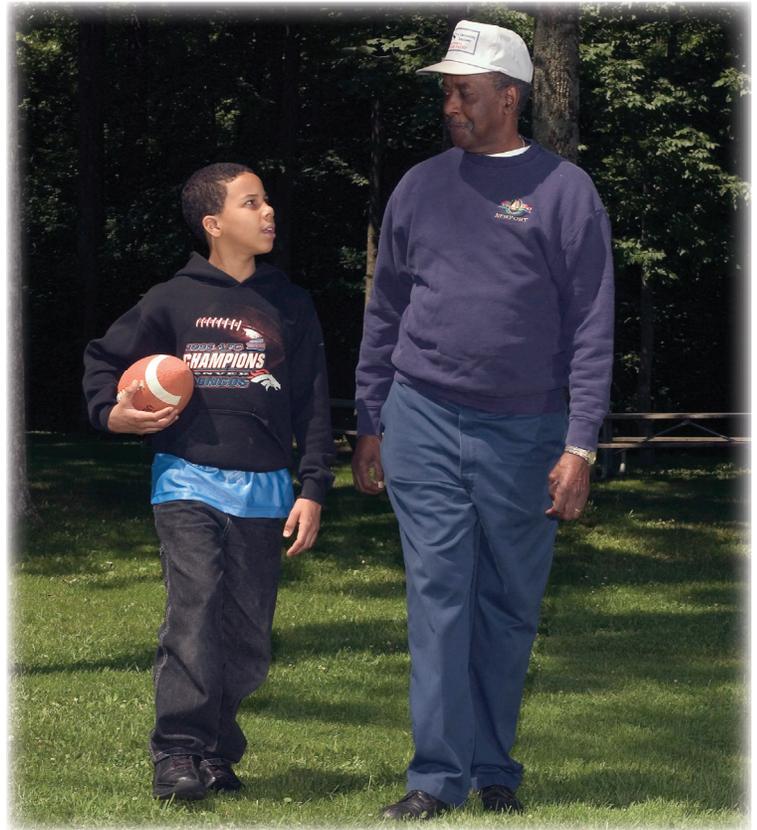


Photo by: Steve Patton and Matt Barton



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## Impact on Caregivers

- \$174,000 is the average cost of AD over a lifetime.
- Seven out of 10 families affected by AD, care for their loved ones at home.
- Families of at-home AD individuals provide 75 percent of the care.
- The remaining 25 percent of AD care costs an average of \$19,000 a year.
- Caregivers often experience stress in their marriages, and on their finances, health, emotions, and other responsibilities.



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## Help for Caregivers

- The Alzheimer's Association sponsors caregivers support groups.
- Find your chapter at [www.alz.org/findchapter.asp](http://www.alz.org/findchapter.asp), and a 24/7 Helpline at 1-800-272-3900.
- Eldercare provides respite care; their number is 1-800-677-1116, website is [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov).

## Social Impact of Alzheimer's Disease

- Currently, more than \$100 billion a year is spent on direct and indirect care costs.
- AD costs businesses in the United States more than \$24 billion to cover Alzheimer's health care.
- More than \$36 billion from the caregivers of AD in missed work days and lost productivity.

## Hope for the Future/New Areas of Research

- National Institutes of Health - Alzheimer's Disease Prevention Initiative has been created.
- \$647 million has been spent on Alzheimer's disease research.
- Prevention strategies are being researched.
- Clinical trials for drugs and other treatments are being studied.

## Sources and More Information

### **Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center**

P.O. Box 8250

Silver Spring, MD 20907

1-800-438-4380

Website: [www.alzheimers.nia.nih.gov](http://www.alzheimers.nia.nih.gov)

### **Alzheimer's Association**

225 N. Michigan Avenue, Suite 1700

Chicago, IL 60601

1-800-272-3900

Website: [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

e-mail: [info@alz.org](mailto:info@alz.org)

### **Alzheimer's Association of Greater Kentucky and Southern Indiana**

3703 Taylorsville Road, Suite 102, Louisville, KY 40220

(502) 451-4266, Helpline 800-272-3900

Or 1065 Dove Run Road, Lexington, KY 40502

(859) 266-5283, Helpline: 800-272-3900

Website: [www.alzinky.org](http://www.alzinky.org)

### **Sanders-Brown Center on Aging**

UK Alzheimer's Disease Center

800 S. Limestone, Lexington, KY 40536-0230

1-859-323-6040

Website: [www.mc.uky.edu/coa](http://www.mc.uky.edu/coa)

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