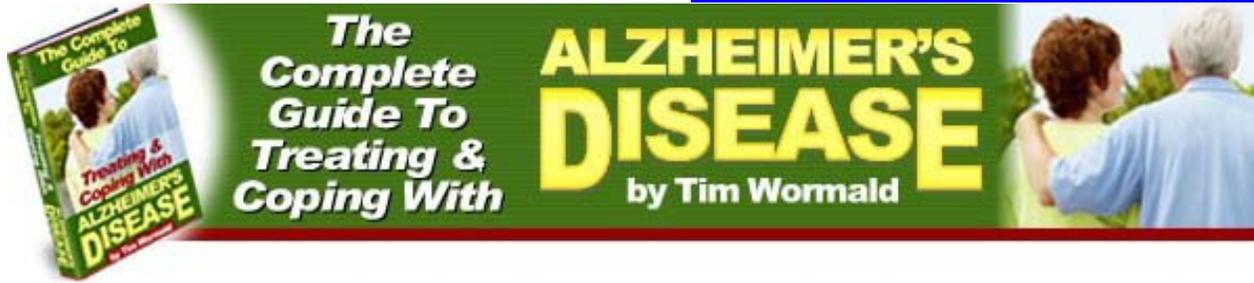


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## The Complete Guide to Treating and Coping With Alzheimer's Disease

By Tim Wormald

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## **Part-I: Introduction**

### **1. Alzheimer's Disease - An Overview**

Alzheimer's disease is a common disease and a major cause of death among the elderly today.

German physician, *Alois Alzheimer*, was the first to identify Alzheimer's disease in 1907. So far, the cause of the disease and any cure for it are unknown.

Until recently, diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease was very difficult. The symptoms are similar to natural old age and were often lightly passed over as 'old age syndrome'.

#### **Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease**

Although there is no permanent cure for Alzheimer's disease, the best way to prevent it is through early detection. Some common early symptoms of this disease are:

- Difficulty or being unsure while performing routine jobs
- Changes in behavioral patterns like becoming violent or abusive
- Family history of the disease
- Unable to use proper and simple language or common terms in daily conversation
- Unable to remember recent events but easily remember long ago events.
- Misplacing things and keeping them in the most unusual places
- Becoming lost in your own home or street and unable to locate your own home

A person with Alzheimer's disease can become disoriented as they lose their normal reasoning and power of judgment. They are unable to function independently. Managing daily activities

slowly becomes ever more difficult. Their ability to analyze events and communicate with those around them can deteriorate significantly, which causes marked changes in their personality.

### ***How does Alzheimer's Affect Brain Functioning?***

Often, brain autopsies of Alzheimer's patients reveal certain abnormalities. The brain shows growth and entanglement of abnormal fibers with brain tissue filaments. These could be the cause behind various senile patches of degenerated nerve endings. This damage interferes with the normal transmission of brain impulses through the different parts and cells of the brain.

The brain is damaged by Alzheimer's disease. It affects people of any age group, although it is more common among people in their sixties.

Alzheimer's disease is progressive, but the rate of progress differs between individuals. Some succumb to the disease within a few years of diagnosis while others live with it for up to two decades. Severe brain damage can cause death in an otherwise healthy person.

### **Treatment Options**

Psychological tests concentrate on testing your memory, thinking ability and identifying objects. These tests determine the presence of Alzheimer's disease and may distinguish between it and other forms of dementia. Sometimes, patients can suffer from temporary dementia problems due to stress or even depression.

So, it is best to conduct tests to find out if it really is Alzheimer's disease.

Although there is no permanent cure, certain drugs may reduce the deterioration of neurotransmitters of the brain. Such drugs include **acetaminophen, ibuprofen** and **aspirin**, which are not steroids and act as anti-inflammatory drugs.

**Anticholinesterase inhibition treatment** has been used to reduce deposits in the brain, but recent findings nullify the effectiveness of such inhibition treatment for Alzheimer's disease.

These deposits targeted by this treatment. accelerate brain cell deterioration and the progress towards imminent death.

Food which is rich in Vitamin B and antioxidants can control degenerative effects of Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's disease is fatal as brain cells slowly lose their capacity to perform and then other vital systems of your body suffer, eventually leading to total failure of body functions. The best option is early detection of the disease so that the best possible treatment options can be undertaken.

## **Part-II: Understanding Alzheimer's Disease**

### **2. What is Alzheimer's Disease?**

Alzheimer's disease is a silent killer.

It slowly and steadily causes the brain to deteriorate. Initially, a person with AD (Alzheimer's disease) could experience intermittent memory lapses with other symptoms like lack of proper judgment, an inability to express themselves properly, confusing views and, sometimes, changes in their personality.

Alzheimer's disease is very common in the twenty-first century, with more than eighteen million affected people all over the world. Alzheimer's disease destroys neurons and affects neurotransmitters of your nervous system. This harms normal functioning of the brain. Still, the exact cause for Alzheimer's disease is unknown and there is no cure for it at this writing.

It sounds depressing, and it is, but remember that the progress of this disease differs from person to person.

#### **Common Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease**

These are high blood pressure, high homocysteine levels, family history of the disease, nervous disorders, difficulty in doing normal routine work, repetitive attitudes and losing interest in activities which were previously enjoyed.

Females get it more than men do.

They can take certain medications and supplements like Vitamin E capsules to slow down the progress of the disease.

So far, not one single item can be taken or used which has shown a huge effect on AD (Alzheimer's Disease.) However, there have been many tests that show a variety of things you can do to help offset the disease in different degrees.

Some changes in lifestyle and behavior patterns like:

- keeping a relaxed attitude
- listening to soothing music
- regular massage sessions
- spending time with pets like cats and dogs
- going for walks with friends or care-givers
- family counseling, and even
- bright light therapy.

Getting the disease diagnosed early can improve the treatment options.

### 3. What Causes Alzheimer's Disease?

The brain begins to deteriorate long before they experience any single symptom of Alzheimer's disease.

There are a number of theories for the cause of Alzheimer's disease. But, it is most likely the cumulative effect of various factors. Different patients of Alzheimer's disease exhibit different symptoms of the disease; clinical, pathological, psychological, and effects on their nervous systems.

Factors thought to be responsible for the occurrence of Alzheimer's disease include:

- **Genes:** If you have a family history of Alzheimer's disease, there is a high chance of you acquiring it at some time. Your chances increase with the number of affected members in your family. Even if only one of your parents has Alzheimer's disease, your chances may be doubled or tripled for getting it over people who do not have it in their family history.
- **Down's syndrome:** If you have Down's syndrome or Trisomy 21, your chances for the occurrence of Alzheimer's disease increase. You might develop certain pathological symptoms, but may not show any clinical symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.
- **Mutation chromosomes:** The chromosomes 1, 10, 12, 14, 21 could cause Alzheimer's disease. Sometimes, late onset of the disease could be due to APOE gene variants on Chromosome 19.
- **Age:** Old age is synonymous with memory loss and other marked changes in behavioral and functional patterns. So, it is difficult to identify Alzheimer's disease symptoms in old age. But, general failing health in old age is believed to contribute to the onset of Alzheimer's disease.
- **Stress:** Stress puts pressure on your nervous system, leading to development of free radicals. Such stress, specifically in old age, is a major cause for Alzheimer's disease.

- **Injuries:** Severe head injuries and trauma damage can disrupt normal blood flow to brain. There, sensitive brain nerves are at immense risk because of the depleted blood flow and the result may be various fibrous tangles. Deposits of beta amyloid protein occur during head injuries, which do not allow easy blood flow. There are established links of such deposits with dementia symptoms. Hence, this could be an important cause for Alzheimer's disease. Other diseases like **high blood pressure** and **blood sugar levels, stroke, atherosclerotic disease and diabetes** also dislocate the blood supply to the brain, and can cause late onset of Alzheimer's disease.
  
- **Female gender:** As mentioned before, the incidence of Alzheimer's is higher in females. One possible reason for this could be the loss of Estrogen hormones after menopause. Hormonal imbalances are common during menopause and contribute towards the occurrence of Alzheimer's disease in females.
  
- **Education:** low levels of brain activity such as with people that become “couch potatoes” in front of their TV etc, may reduce their chances of avoiding mental deterioration and, possibly, Alzheimer's disease.
  
- **Poverty:** Poverty is another important cause of Alzheimer's disease, as you are unable to understand, diagnose, or take preventive steps to protect yourself against disease because of the lack of money, regular medical consultations and not even being aware of the risk of the disease and any protective measures that you might take. Vitamins are expensive and people on low incomes often do not get enough proper foods to maintain their health into old age.

Higher education may improve the thinking power of the brain and increase the functioning of your brain. Keeping your brain active may reduce the effects or delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

An active brain also prevents the onset of dementia. Another effect of higher education may be to increase your standard of living and make you more aware of various diseases, their symptoms

and causes, as a well-educated person is more likely to read news and health journals and be exposed to what can happen to them in old age.

There are conflicting reports about two other possible causes of Alzheimer's disease. One is the **presence of high aluminum levels in the environment** and the other is **smoking**.

Some research findings were said to indicate that nicotine in the brain, due to smoking, might protect you against Alzheimer's disease but **this has been proven false**. **Cigarettes are not good for you.**

Earlier studies on animals and humans were reported to indicate that nicotine exposure inhibits the formation of amyloid plaque, a key feature of Alzheimer's disease.

However, a new study shows that chronic nicotine use may worsen the effects of a brain protein called tau, which is responsible for the fibrous tangles that are a hallmark of the disease.

So, any good effect in smoking would be more than canceled out, according to the latest research.

## 4. Are You at Risk of Getting Alzheimer's Disease?

There are certain risk factors which are possibly related to the occurrence of Alzheimer's disease, although there is no certainty that they cause it. You need to be aware of them and take early measures to reduce the possibility of them helping to encourage the onset of Alzheimer's disease. Just remember that **the apparent absence of any such risk factor does not protect you from Alzheimer's disease.**

### *Alzheimer's Risk Factors:*

**Age:** Alzheimer's disease is common among the elderly, mostly in the 65-85 year range. Most Alzheimer's disease patients belong to this age group.

Because natural deterioration, due to old age, and Alzheimer's share many of the same symptoms, it can be difficult to detect Alzheimer's disease in elderly people, many of whom tend to forget, lose, or misplace things. Alzheimer's disease is possible but extremely rare in other age groups.

**Genes:** As with any other disease, hereditary factors pose a major risk for Alzheimer's disease. If Alzheimer's disease is common among your family members, you stand a high chance of contracting it at some time. There are different specific genes in your body. One group is believed to help to prevent the occurrence of Alzheimer's disease while another seems to accelerate its occurrence.

Mutations in genes, which could lead to dementia or other associated symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, occur in specific age groups.

**Environment:** High concentrations of zinc, aluminum and other metals may harm brain tissue. Such deposits in the brain can affect easy blood flow and damage nerves, leading to Alzheimer's disease. Adequate proof of the risk element of such metals is available through brain autopsies of patients with Alzheimer's disease.

**Viruses:** Scientists are also trying to establish links between certain viruses and Alzheimer's disease.

**Dietary restrictions:** You could reduce the risk of contracting Alzheimer's disease by restricting your diet and excluding foods containing high levels of fats and sugar. It is best to consume simple, balanced and low-fat foods to keep your blood sugar levels normal. There are conflicting reports about the occurrence of Alzheimer's disease due to the intake of certain vitamins and fatty acids.

**Cardiovascular risks:** If you have cardiovascular problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, hypertension, diabetes, or you have had heart strokes, you stand a higher risk of developing Alzheimer's disease at some stage in your life. However, one ray of hope is that you can try to prevent its occurrence by changing your diet to include lots of fruits and vegetables, and lower your cholesterol levels.

And, don't forget that exercise also helps prevent vascular problems.

**Alcohol:** High and regular intakes of alcohol could damage your brain significantly and cause dementia, leading to Alzheimer's disease. Restricted alcohol intake is more beneficial to your health.

**Exercise:** Regular exercise keeps all body parts and systems healthy and active, which can prevent or reduce the occurrence of Alzheimer's disease.

**Stress:** High stress levels react negatively on your health and cause various problems. Specifically, increased stress pushes hot blood to the brain and other parts of the nervous system, which often cause strokes and possibly Alzheimer's disease.

**Hormones:** Women have increased chances of acquiring Alzheimer's disease as their estrogen levels drop during menopause causing hormonal imbalances.

**Poverty and Education:** Poverty is often the cause for lack of sufficient awareness about different diseases including Alzheimer's disease. People who keep their minds active with continual learning, increase their brain activity. This can help prevent the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

**Medications:** Studies indicate a possible connection between certain medicines and Alzheimer's disease, although there is no conclusive proof. It could be due to the highly sedative effects of certain strong medications, which might later lead to Alzheimer's disease.

## 5. Signs and Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive disease and is difficult to detect in the early stages.

Alzheimer's sets in slowly, with minor signs and signals at first. It gradually displays more serious symptoms until all aspects of the disease are manifest. The appearance of Alzheimer's symptoms or signs do not necessarily indicate a particular stage of the disease. You should have a thorough medical examination of any changes in you that might provide clues of the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

The early signs of Alzheimer's disease are only able to be recognized by doctors who are knowledgeable about the disease.

You will only realize that you have it after clear symptoms begin to show.

### **POSSIBLE Indicators of Alzheimer's Disease**

#### *Early Symptoms*

- Absentmindedness
- Forgetting familiar names
- Unable to concentrate on anything
- Unable to recall events of a few hours ago

#### *Developing Symptoms*

- Puzzled feelings
- Loss of memory
- Forgetful of daily tasks like brushing teeth, washing hands or combing hair

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