

# Alzheimer's Disease

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## WHAT IS ALZHEIMER'S?

A progressive neurological disorder that results in deterioration of brain cells. It is said to be a common form of dementia. It disrupts the ability of someone to function independently due to the continuous decline in thinking, behavioural and social skills. [1]

## RISK FACTORS [1]

- Age: risk increases as you get older
- Higher risk found in females.
- Family history: increased risk if you have a firstdegree family member who has Alzheimer's.
- Isolated lifestyle or late onset depression.
- Down syndrome.
- Previous head trauma.
- Increase risk has been seen in those with a lower level of education

## CAUSES

Plaques and tangles have been found to cause Alzheimer's. The plaques are found in between dying brain cells and are produced from a protein called beta-amyloid. The tangles are found within nerve cells and are made from a protein known as tau.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS [1;2]

- Reduction in the ability to form or remember new information which can result in repetitive questions or conversations, misplacing things, forgetting conversations or events and/or getting lost in familiar places.
- Diminished ability to reason, do complex tasks and exercise judgement such as poor understanding of safety, can not manage finances, unable to make proper decisions and not able to plan complex tasks. Multitasking is especially difficult.
- Decrease in the ability to recognize, analyse and mentally manipulate objects, which is not due to eye problems such as not being able to recognize faces, find objects in direct view, use simple tools or even place clothing on the right body part.
- Impairment in speech, reading and/or writing such as struggling with common words while speaking resulting in hesitations or speech errors and may also have writing errors.
- Personality and behaviour changes such as obsessive or compulsive behaviour, apathy, aggression, social withdrawal and/or loss of empathy, interest or motivation.
- Decline in the ability to make judgements and decisions.

## COMPLICATIONS

Due to a decline in cognitive functions such as memory and language loss, decrease in judgement, etc; it will result in complications with treatment and health such as a [1]:

- Lack of proper communication of symptoms such as pain being experienced or symptoms of other illnesses that they may be experiencing.
- Unable to follow a prescribed treatment plan.
- Notice side effects by medications.
- As Alzheimer's progresses the changes occurring in the brain start to affect physical functions such as swallowing, balance, bowel and bladder control which can result in [1]:
- Breathing in food or liquid into the lungs, also known as aspiration.
- Infections such as pneumonia.
- Increased risk of falling which thus increase the risk of fractures.
- Bedsores due to being bed ridden.
- Malnutrition or dehydration especially if they do not have anyone to take care of them.

## TREATMENTS OPTIONS

Alzheimer's cannot be cured; however, the progression can be slowed down. It requires a multidisciplinary team, including social workers, occupational therapists, physiotherapist, nurses and doctors. They are pharmacological and non-pharmacological therapies for Alzheimer's treatment. The pharmacological treatments are divided into treatments for memory, behaviour, sleep change, etc. The non-pharmacological treats include cognitive behavioural therapy, exercise and activities, psychotherapy, etc.[2]

## LIFESTYLE MODIFICATIONS [1;4]

- Eating healthy: foods less in saturated fat, more fresh products such as fruits and vegetables, healthy oils;
- Follow up with the doctor and treatments of other chronic conditions that you may have such a diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol, etc.
- Ask the doctor about techniques to stop smoking.
- Exercise regularly to keep active mentally and physically.
- Participate in social events such as reading, dancing, playing board games, making art, playing an instrument, and anything that involves mental and social engagement.