



June is Alzheimer's Awareness Month. We at Active Aging 365 is extremely passionate and well educated in Alzheimer, and we want to make sure you know that dealing with Alzheimer's is our specialty. We found that coping with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease is extremely difficult on everyone in the family. There are many different aspects to consider when discussing an individualized care plan for the future of your loved ones and your entire family or support group. Since we specialize in Alzheimer's disease and this type of care plan in particular, we invite you to call us for your important first step to an initial consultation at (310) 962-7502.

Again, since Alzheimer's is a topic we are well-versed in, this month's newsletter is written a little differently than our other monthly newsletters. In an effort to provide our readers with as much information and education as possible, the newsletter is broken down into sections with headings that explain exactly what is covered in that specific section. Of special interest in this newsletter is the extensive amount of information and guidance we integrated into the newsletter. The instructions written are highly detailed explanations that you will not find anywhere else. We also have provided comprehensive information about what it means to be a caregiver and where to find support. An extensive amount of time and expertise went into the writing of this newsletter. We sincerely hope that you find it to be insightful, instructional, and most importantly helpful.

[Please download below files on Alzheimer and addition reference can be found on this link.](#) Thank you for joining us at Active Aging 365, Strive Happy and Stay Healthy.

What is Alzheimer's Disease?

Alzheimer's is a degenerative brain disorder. It effects the brain in several different ways, ultimately resulting in the deterioration of brain cells to the point of their death. According to this website, <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers-disease-fact-sheet> Alzheimer's disease is currently ranked as the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. However, some estimates have the disease ranked at third for cause of death in the US, after heart disease and cancer.

There are two different types of Alzheimer's disease, Early-onset and Late-onset. Unfortunately, scientists don't know what causes Alzheimer's and there is no cure. Some scientists believe a type of genetic mutation might be the cause of Early-onset Alzheimer's, but they have yet to identify a particular gene that is responsible. Likewise, the cause for Late-onset Alzheimer's is a mystery, although scientists speculate it is a combination of genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors. Unfortunately, just like Early-onset, there is only scientific speculation regarding a cause.

The most common form of Alzheimer's is Late-onset. Symptoms usually begin to manifest in people in their mid-60's. The fact that Alzheimer's predominantly affects older adults is one of Science's greatest mysteries. Researchers continue to study the brain, but they have yet to determine a specific cause or reason Alzheimer's affects the 60 plus population at such a higher rate than any other age group. There are of course changes that occur in the brain as a person ages but of the identified age-related issues scientists have discovered thus far, none have been identified as the causal factor in Late-onset Alzheimer's.

Signs & Symptoms

Typically, issues surrounding memory is the first indication that cognitive issues may be present. Unfortunately, due to the degenerative nature of this disease, such memory impairments only worsen over time. The severity of the cognitive impairment determines the extent to which a person's everyday life is affected. Similarly, the level of cognitive dysfunction determines the level of independence lost by the patient. For some, memory impairment is not the first symptom of Alzheimer's. Cognitive symptoms can vary in the part of the brain they effect. Thus, sometimes symptoms manifest as impaired reasoning and judgement, visual and spatial issues, or problems with tasks such as word recall ability. However, when most people think about Alzheimer's, they associate it with memory loss, which is most commonly related to Dementia.

Alzheimer's is the most common cause of Dementia, which usually occurs in older adults. Dementia is characterized by the loss of cognitive abilities such as thoughts, memory, retention of information, and processes involved with decision making. Further complications due to brain deterioration include impulse control problems. The inability to control impulses can cause a patient to exhibit inappropriate behaviors and act erroneously, often manifesting in extreme or aggressive behavioral outbursts.

Each patient is affected differently because cognitive impairments are individual in nature. This means the type and severity of symptoms a patient experiences is directly linked to the level of brain deterioration. If a patient's cognitive abilities become extremely compromised, it results in the loss of their independence. This contributes to the many reasons why people diagnosed with Alzheimer's often experience a significant amount of mental health problems such as depression, grief, anxiety, anger, and fear. Symptoms of Alzheimer's can come on suddenly, especially in people over the age of 65. Therefore, if you or a loved one notice changes in cognitive abilities, be safe and

make an appointment to see a doctor. If you are diagnosed with Alzheimer's, there are treatment options available to you.

Diagnosis & Treatment

The most important factor in diagnosis is self-reporting of symptoms or reporting for a family member. For this type of reporting, the patient or family must provide key information regarding the problems they are experiencing in addition to specifics regarding how the problems are affecting their daily life. A diagnosis of Alzheimer's is usually determined after patients are given a full diagnostic work up. This includes the following types of tests: physical and neurological examinations, lab tests, mental status exams, neuropsychological testing, and various brain imaging procedures. According to the Mayo Clinic website, the results from these full diagnostic panels are designed to detect dementia, "and can determine with relatively high accuracy whether Alzheimer's disease or another condition is the cause." Ultimately, this means despite a patient undergoing numerous and complicated tests, doctors cannot be certain if a person truly has Alzheimer's disease. The only time a doctor can be certain a patient had Alzheimer's is upon their death and subsequent examination of their brain.

Again, just to be clear, despite the extensive number of tests a patient is given, Alzheimer's disease can never truly be diagnosed with complete certainty while the patient is alive.

Active Aging 365 is Designed to Help

It is the mission of our staff here at Active Aging 365 to help families during times such as the unexpected diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, or the suspicion that a patient has Alzheimer's disease. Our staff is specially trained in helping families to manage all of the issues that arise from such a diagnosis. We have staff that include Aging Care Specialists and Elder Care Specialists, who ensure that the appropriate healthcare management is achieved through the development of specialized, individual care plans. Click the following link to be taken directly to this page on our website for more information. <https://activeaging365.com/our-services>

We offer consultations, so please feel free to contact us so that we can help, as this is our specialty and passion. If you choose to handle the care of your family member yourself, we understand and respect your decision. Despite how you choose to handle this process, the staff here at Active Aging 365 feels so passionate about helping, we worked to assemble the most pertinent information and directions to advise you. If you apply the information provided here, the results will prove to be invaluable for your family.

Taking Charge of the Situation

When life-altering news such as this type of diagnosis is being discussed, it is absolutely imperative that one member of the family take charge of the patient's health

care. To be clear about technical terms in health care, the family member that takes charge of the situation and plans on taking care of the patient is called, “the caregiver” like the one mentioned in NorthStarElderCare.com. Despite the fact, the most caregivers handle the mechanics of the treatment, it is most critical for other family members to educate themselves to ensure appropriate and informed decisions can be made regarding the patient’s health. For example, it is plausible that a patient or caregiver would ask their clinician why they feel compelled to go to such extensive lengths of testing for an undeterminable disease. What is to be gained from these pervasive and probative diagnostic panels? Seemingly, the mental health of the patient would not be aided in any way, but rather it would be hindered. It would also seem that such invasive tests would be detrimental to the mental health of the patient, which, as we know, is already at least somewhat unstable. When making decisions, caregivers need to think about what is best for their family and act accordingly. For example, maybe instead of having the patient complete all the suggested tests, your key family decides on a few tests that seem reasonable and the results helpful. Again, it is up to the family to decide, with the caregiver usually having the “ultimate final decision-making power.” In this respect, role of caregiver is a huge responsibility in this type of situation.

The information below is designed to help the caregiver and the family members from the beginning. The reference of a beginning as it is used here, means from the time your family decides that there are abnormal cognitive issues, and the decision is made that it is time to consult a physician for help. As issues may already be affecting day-to-day independence or threatening personal capacity of cognition, one or more family members of the elder must have alerted the need to make an appointment.

Once this decision has been made and an appointment is set, there is much preparation to complete before the first appointment.

Information to Prepare Before Going to the Doctor

The following is a fairly comprehensive list of information you and your family should put together before going to your first doctor’s appointment. Preparation here means assimilating as much information as possible prior to the appointment, all of which you will take with you to the appointment. Here are some examples of information you need to have prepared. You will need access to the patient’s medical history in addition to the patient’s maternal, paternal, and any sibling’s medical information and medical history. You will also need up to date contact information for any member of the patient’s current medical team if applicable, a record of all current medications and supplements the patient takes including dosage amounts and prescriber information, and most importantly, information regarding the current symptoms being exhibited along with an explanation as to what extent they are affecting the patient’s ability to be independent. Teamwork is crucial during this time because both the patient and the caregiver need the ability to provide their personal insight into the situation.

We know this is all overwhelming, particularly the part where you need to record the cognitive issues exhibited complete with an explanation of how this negatively effects the patient's ability to function independently. Our staff at Active Aging 365 suggests that in order to best explain what you have witnessed, best practice is to schedule yourself a generous and specific amount of time to gather your thoughts. During this time, you need to sit down in a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. You can either write or type out the reasons for your visit, using as much detail to explain all aspects of the situation. Furthermore, it is helpful to ask other people who know the patient and have constant contact for any information they can provide that could possibly help or further validate the issues you are witnessing. Written documentation of this information will need to be included. The reason each person close to the patient needs to complete this process is because often different people see different things based on setting or time of day, and each person's perception as to how the cognitive problems being witnessed are affecting the patient are all valid. All of the information you have put together will not replace the paperwork you have to fill out at the doctor's office, but it will be invaluable information to have on hand when filling out the office paperwork.

When it is time for the initial appointment, remember to bring all the information you assembled with you to the doctor. If possible, bring a copy for the doctor's file, or ask the employees at the doctor's front desk to make a copy of the information you bring to place in your patient file; this ensures the doctor's file will have all of the information you have already assimilated to reference during the appointment and later when reviewing the patient's file.

The First Office Visit

The doctor will ask a multitude of questions that the aforementioned preparation will help you answer. Here are some examples of information the doctor's office will want to know regarding patient's basic mental health status. Be prepared to answer questions like the following: have the patient's eating or sleeping habits changed? Are they acting more depressed or moody? Has there been any physical changes that limit the patient in any way? Has the patient's behavior changed, and if so, how? How is their energy level compared to before the symptoms came about? The more information you can provide the doctor with, the better. When you prepare beforehand, you are placing yourself in the best position possible for the situation. When you are in a meeting with doctors, discussing such serious subject matter, it is very stressful, and trying to provide the type of information required in this situation is an impossible task to complete with no prior thoughts on the subject. Preparation is key; it will help in any decisions that need to be made in addition to completing treatment options and plans for the future.

Too often, people make the mistake of simply following any and all orders the doctor gives without question. Please understand that now is not the time for that type of passive behavior. If your doctor does not invite the family, the caregiver in particular, to be involved in the health care plan and decision making, the caregiver must insist on taking an active role in the patient's health care and treatment plan. Lifestyles and lives

literally depend on the caregiver assuming a leadership position in which they assert themselves into the planning and decision making, particularly regarding diagnosis and treatment plans.

Because there is no cure for Alzheimer's, there are medications which can possibly help the patient by slowing the deterioration or help with managing some symptoms. There are programs and supports out there designed to help patients with Alzheimer's as well as their caregivers. Caring for a loved one who has Alzheimer's can prove to be extremely taxing on the caregiver. These are some reasons that insisting on taking an active role in your loved one's care is imperative, as your family needs to help decide what is best as far as diagnosis and treatment options. If the subject to an exhaustive battery of invasive tests will help your loved ones, then you do not have to participate. It is your right to decide what you do and do not want for your loved one. It is imperative that you understand this concept.

Your health and the health of your family is your responsibility, and it is up to you to determine what is appropriate for your family. Just because a doctor recommends something does not mean you have to accept and follow their advice. Do not let yourself be intimidated by doctors trying to force medical assessments or treatments on you or your family. Furthermore, no one should feel pressured to make decisions on the spot. It is absolutely acceptable to take some time in order to study your options and discuss what you learn with your family before making any final decisions. Caregivers, must always take the final health decisions on behalf of the family and that is an abundant amount of responsibility caregivers handle.

The Caregiver

As a caregiver, you are the final decision maker, especially as the patient's level of independence digresses. This responsibility is demanding and oppressive. Caring for someone who has Alzheimer's is physically and emotionally demanding and extremely exhausting, especially to face a multitude of obstacles when attending to their loved ones.

Caregivers often face their own battles with depression, anger, grief, sadness, and stress. A caregiver must pay attention to their own health as well as the patient's, otherwise they burn out quickly, causing more problems. Additionally, a caregiver must have a support system of their own to be able to ask for and receive help when it is needed. As stated earlier, you must learn all you can about Alzheimer's to make the best decisions with the information at hand and on time. Throughout the process, you must ask questions of doctors, nurses, and any other member of your loved one's treatment team. If this is your job as caregiver, do not be afraid to speak up, ask questions, or even change clinicians if you don't feel that your doctor is the right one for you and your family. The right team is crucial to a caregiver's effectiveness. Additionally, it is helpful for caregivers to join support groups and work through feelings and emotions to really understand that they are not alone. Support groups also share

information and ideas about taking care of someone with Alzheimer's disease that make life somewhat easier when you can implement them.

There are huge networks of support for caregivers and in particular area focusing on Alzheimer. Contact us at Active Aging 365 or your local Alzheimer's Association affiliate to connect you with the support and resources for caregivers with a patient with Alzheimer's. Remember, no one should be alone in this and there is abundant help, so please take advantage to maintain your own health before others. Never undermine your own health care needs to take the time to take care of yourself. We all know why the flight attendants in an airplane offers the oxygen masks to you first then the others you support, they do this as an effective measure to save the most lives in a catastrophic incidents. You are most effective by making sure you are well protected before you become the protector.

Again, Alzheimer's is a terrible disease with no cure and no known cause, especially when we watch our very own loved ones digress to less than perfect wit and charm of themselves. So if you or your loved one is diagnosed with Alzheimer's, please learn all you can to find support; our specialized RN here at Active Aging 365 has been certified by the NCCDP (The National Council of Certified Dementia Care Practitioners) – as a CADDCT (Certified Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Trainer). www.nccdp.org

We are here to specialize in this type of initial diagnosis and trained to help you with proper education, resources, and advocacy while developing an individualized plan to help you and your family in your time of need. Please reach out, we are passionate about helping families in exactly this type of situation. You can fill out a message to send on our website, or feel free to call us at (310) 335-2005. If it is after hours, call (310) 962-7502. We are here for you.

Above are “extra” information for this month.

The following information is a list of article topics from this website:

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers/caregiving>

These articles are all based on topics that involve helping caregivers manage and take care of themselves. Each title is a link to the article itself. The staff here at Active Aging 365 hope you find the support you need. Remember, we are here and have extensive knowledge in dealing with patients and families affected by Alzheimer's disease. Do not hesitate to reach out to us; we are here to help.

These are the 10 article titles/links to the articles from the website listed above.

- [*Alzheimer's Caregiving: Changes in Communication Skills*](#)
- [*Managing Personality and Behavior Changes in Alzheimer's*](#)
- [*Coping with Agitation and Aggression in Alzheimer's Disease*](#)

- *Alzheimer's and Hallucinations, Delusions, and Paranoia*
- *6 Tips for Managing Sleep Problems in Alzheimer's*
- *Adapting Activities for People with Alzheimer's Disease*
- *Managing Medicines for a Person with Alzheimer's*
- *Going to the Hospital: Tips for Dementia Caregivers*
- *Alzheimer's Caregiving: Caring for Yourself*
- *Tips for Coping with Sundowning*