

Dementia Fact Sheet

Definition of Dementia

- (de mens) Latin for “out of mind”
- Permanent loss of multiple intellectual functions
- Alois Alzheimer first described this disease in 1906 in a brain specimen from an autopsy.
- Alzheimer’s disease is one type of dementia, although it is often used synonymously with dementia.

Epidemiology Of Dementia

- Approximately four million Americans are afflicted with Alzheimer’s disease. In Alabama, over 60,000 people suffer from dementia.
- Approximately 10% of individuals over 65 years, and 47% of persons over age 85 years have dementia. Dementia afflicts both men and women in all racial, religious and socioeconomic groups.

Typical Symptoms of Dementia

Intellectual Symptoms

Amnesia: Loss of memory function

Aphasia: Loss of ability to understand spoken or written word (receptive) and/or the inability to speak (expressive)

Apraxia: Loss of the ability to perform remembered motor tasks, for example, buttoning a shirt, turning a door knob, eating or walking.

Agnosia: Loss of the ability to recognize sensory messages, e.g., what things look or feel like , or visual agnosia, e.g., the face of a close relative or the feel of car keys.

Psychiatric Symptoms

- Depression – 25%
- Hallucinations (seeing things) 25%, and Delusions (false beliefs) 30%
- Poor judgement, irritability, inappropriate behavior
- Major personality changes

Behavioral Symptoms

- Wandering, hoarding, undressing
- Resisting Care, hostility

Damage Outside the Brain

- Only the brain is damaged by Alzheimer’s disease.
- Other organ systems are not damaged.
- Patients frequently appear quite healthy.

Reversible Causes of Intellectual Dementia

Five to 20% of the elderly patients who appear demented have treatable diseases such as depression, hormone imbalance (i.e., hypothyroidism) or drug (medication) induced confusion.

Causes Of Dementia

Dementia is caused by the death of nerve cells. Once a nerve cell dies, it cannot be replaced and its function may be lost. Nerve cell death is caused by many diseases.

Common causes of dementia include:

- Alzheimer's disease – 60-70%
- Diffuse Lewy body disease 10-20%
- Multiple small strokes – 5-10%
- Multiple other causes – 10-15%

Causes Of Alzheimer's Disease

The cause of nerve cell death in Alzheimer's disease is unknown. Inheritance plays some role:

- Five percent strongly inheritable (autosomal dominant).
- Twenty to 60% of patients may have a genetic vulnerability.
- There is no fool-proof genetic test for Alzheimer's disease.
- Damage may result from accumulation of a toxic brain protein called amyloid.

Tests for Alzheimer's Disease

- There is no foolproof test that predicts your risk for Alzheimer's disease.
- Diagnosis requires a good clinical history and mental status examination.

Treatment For Alzheimer's Disease

Prevention:

- Estrogen therapy may help women after menopause.
- Vitamin E may slow onset.
- Gingko biloba has not been proven to be beneficial

Current Treatment:

- Early treatment offers some hope.
- Medications slow progression in early stages, (i.e., Aricept, Exelon, and others).
- Psychiatric symptoms usually respond to medication.
- No treatment stops nerve cell death in Alzheimer's disease.

Future Therapy:

- Future therapy will prevent the death of nerve cells and maximize the function of surviving nerve cells.
- Vaccines may reduce damage from amyloid.
- Brain cell implants offer limited promise.

The Course of Alzheimer's Disease

- Most patients survive 8-10 years, but can live much longer.
- Each patient has a different mixture of symptoms.
- Patients have long survivals because other organ systems are not damaged.

Early Stage (3 to 5 years)

- Mild amnesia (memory loss), good function at home, few psychiatric symptoms.

Middle Stage (3 to 10 years)

- Many intellectual impairments, poor function at home, many psychiatric/behavioral problems.

Late Stage (3 to 10 years)

- Multiple, severe intellectual impairments.
- Minimal function at home.
- Problems with walking, talking, chewing, and swallowing
- Loss of bowel and bladder function.

End-Of-Life Care

- Most patients die from complications like infection.
- Quality of life is more important than length of survival.
- Feeding tubes can produce discomfort and complications.
- End-stage patients do very poorly on life-support machines.
- Hospice may be available to help.

Ways To Protect Your Brain Over Age 65

- Stay mentally and socially active.
- Stay physically fit.
- Control blood pressure and heart disease.
- Visit your doctor on a regular basis.

Financial Care

- Dementia costs Alabama over 2.7 billion dollars per year.
- Fifty to sixty percent of all nursing home residents are demented. The annual cost of nursing homes care is between \$42,000 and \$50,000 per year in Alabama. Most expenses are paid by patient's families.
- Families provide 70% of the care given Alzheimer's victims. The total cost to society in caring for the AD patient averages \$47,000 per year for each patient.
- Paying for Alzheimer's disease – including cost of diagnosis, treatment, nursing home care, informal care, and lost wages – is estimated to be more than 80 billion dollars each year in America.

 MOST OFTEN CALLED TELEPHONE NUMBERS: 

Alzheimer's Association, North Alabama Chapter (Huntsville)	(256) 880-1575
Alzheimer's Resource Center (Dothan)	(334) 702-2273
Alzheimer's Foundation of the South (Mobile)	(334) 438-9095
Alzheimer's of Central Alabama (Birmingham)	(205) 871-7970
Morgan County Mental Health Association	(256) 353-1160
UAB Alzheimer's Disease Center, Memory Disorders Clinic	1-800-333-6543
Division of Healthcare Facilities--Elder Abuse Hotline	1-800-356-9596
Department of Human Resources – Adult Protective Services	1-800-458-7214
Coalition of Alzheimer's and Related Disorders of NW AL (C.A.R.D) (Florence)	(256) 757-8771
Senior Advantage (Montgomery)	(334) 286-3400
Tuscaloosa County Mental Health Association	(205) 752-2689

DEMENTIA EDUCATION & TRAINING PROGRAM MATERIALS

VIDEOTAPES: Available in Public Libraries in Alabama

- Alzheimer's: A Practical Guide to Community Resources
- Alzheimer's: A Practical Guide – Pastoral Care Vol. I&II
- Alzheimer's: A Practical Guide For Sitters – Vol. I&II
- The DETA Brain Series. May be purchased from UA Public Television-1-800-463-8825.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS ON DEMENTIA:

- All In Your Mind (High School Videotape produced for a teenage audience with custom teacher guides).
- All In Your Mind (New Middle School Videotape with custom teacher guides). Program available free to Alabama Teachers. May be purchased from UA Public Television-1-800-463-8825.

FIVE PICTURE BOOKLETS FOR ALABAMA CITIZENS: *

- "Alzheimer's: A Broken Brain
- "Vascular Dementia: An Explanation of Dementia Caused by Multiple Brain Strokes"
- "Psychiatric Complication of Dementia"
- "Crossing the River of Life with Alzheimer's"
- "Parkinson's Disease: A Disorder of Movement, Mood and Thought"

POPULAR HANDOUTS FOR ALABAMA CITIZENS

2060

- Activity Ideas (from A to Z)
- Asking A Dementia Patient to Stop Driving
- Bathing And the Dementia Patient
- Legal Definitions
- Dementia and Driving
- Dental Care and the Dementia Patient
- End of Life Issues
- Financial Decisions and Dementia
- Prevention of Falls in the Dementia Patient
- Recreational Activity for the Dementia Patient
- Ten Questions That Police and Family Should Ask About Driving and Dementia
- Weight Loss in the Dementia Patient
- The Use of Restraints With Demented Patients
- Assessment of Agitation in the Nursing Home Patient
- Pastoral Care and Dementia
- Prevention of Dementia
- AND MANY OTHERS

Web-site: www.alzbrain.org

*Booklets are free to Alabama citizens. Out-of-state individuals may purchase by sending check or purchase order and shipping information to: The University Supply Store, Attn: Jeff Smith, Box 870291, Ferguson Center, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487

ORDER BY PHONE:
(MasterCard, Visa, and Discover Card Accepted)
Call 1-800-825-6802 (Ask for Jeff Smith)

