

# Hope & Healing

## Alzheimer's

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

### Introduction

It's normal to lose some memory as we grow older. One day you may forget to turn off the stove or you can't remember whether your morning's medicines were taken. It is common when simple things like this are forgotten to worry that we are losing our ability to think clearly. Such fears can snowball and if dwelled upon paint the future in bleak terms. On the other hand, a very few people will gradually lose their ability to carry out their daily activities. They may have trouble balancing their checkbooks, get lost when on the way to a familiar place, show a tendency to withdraw from social activities, quarrel easily, curse, and dress inappropriately because their judgment is not good.

### Making the Diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's Disease can't be definitely diagnosed unless you open the skull, take a portion of the brain and place it under the microscope and identify the tangled brain cells and their connections. But, you can come very close by excluding through tests other conditions that act like Alzheimer's. This is why you can become very frustrated when the diagnosis of Alzheimer's is suggested. Tests, like a computerized scan of the brain and certain blood tests, may be done and you may be told that your loved one probably has Alzheimer's. The word probably has to be used because there is no one test that is specific for Alzheimer's, except the brain biopsy that isn't routinely done.

Meanwhile, Alzheimer's is a frequently misdiagnosed disorder of

mental function of older adults. There are other conditions that look like Alzheimer's but are determined not to be Alzheimer's by tests. These include the following:

- **Side Effects of Medicines.** Be certain to have your doctor review the medicines your loved one takes.
- **Substance Abuse.** Abuse of alcohol or other drugs.
- **Metabolism Problems.** Thyroid or other glandular disorders, nutritional deficiencies, anemia.
- **Circulation Problems.** Heart disease, multiple small strokes.
- **Other Brain Problems.** Blocking the flow of spinal fluid within the brain, multiple sclerosis.
- **Infections.** Viruses, fungal infections, AIDS.
- **Trauma.** Injury from a fall in which the head was banged, perhaps one that occurred weeks or days before.
- **Toxic Problems.** Exposure to carbon monoxide or other gases or toxic liquids.
- **Brain Tumor.**

### Three Step Guidelines to the Diagnosis of Alzheimer's

The diagnosis of Alzheimer's follows a three step progression:

1. Dementia — The loss of memory is

severe enough to interfere with the ability to do his or her work and also disrupts the normal flow of social gatherings, such as family get togethers or church activities.

2. The symptoms develop over the course of months to years. There is a slow worsening of memory loss, with confusion about the day, month or year, and a tendency to wander. They often appear irritable and uncooperative, are unable to engage in conversation or appear disinterested in what's going on.
3. Other conditions that act like Alzheimer's are excluded by tests, examinations and studies.

### General Guidelines of Living With Alzheimer's Disease in a Loved One

If Alzheimer's occurs in your loved one you must develop specific goals to help you cope. Your aim will be to assure safety and comfort and to lessen fear, confusion, and stress. These guidelines can be adapted to your own circumstance:

- Be sure about safety. Change the environment to prevent problems. This may mean that you remove the knobs on your stove while you're gone or you may install double locks on doors to prevent wandering.

- Establish routines and stick with them every day so that things are predictable and there are no surprises in what will happen next.
- Accentuate the positive. Praise what is done well.
- Plan for moments of fun and pleasure together.
- Save self-respect. Don't argue with, tease, or test your loved one in public. Be discreet in offering help but do things for your loved one when a particular function is lost.
- Avoid situations that may trigger disruptive behavior, such as large crowds or too many choices. If there is a loss of control of impulses, like taking clothes off in public, or striking out, or accusing an innocent person, try to divert your loved one by getting his attention onto something else.
- Build self-esteem. Let them carry groceries or get in the mail.
- Know where to get help. Many communities have support groups, respite care for the one who cares for the patient with Alzheimer's, and written information.
- When things go badly, use an indirect approach as you respond. Don't argue, explain or try to reason. Instead, try to divert or reassure your loved one. Examine your routines. Perhaps you need to schedule difficult activities for the time of day when your loved one is feeling best.
- Speak slowly and simply and wait for a response.
- Stand where you can be seen or touch an arm or shoulder gently to get attention before you speak and look directly into your loved one's eyes.
- Present one idea at a time.
- If you must repeat something, use the same words and ask your loved one to repeat what you've said, to help his or her understanding.
- Avoid asking questions if you can. Not knowing the answer may be embarrassing.
- Don't offer choices that make decisions difficult.
- Maintain a normal tone of voice and a calm manner.
- Use humor when possible and appropriate.

### Summary \_\_\_\_\_

Most of us who lose some of our ability to remember as we age are experiencing the normal aging process. When other symptoms begin appearing, schedule a visit with your doctor. Memory responds to training just like your muscles respond to exercise. Make a move now to work your brain harder so that your nerve cells and their connections will stay untangled.

### How to Communicate With Your Loved One Who Has Alzheimer's

Take time and be patient are the key words in communicating with someone who has Alzheimer's.

#### These suggestions may help:

- Always use a tone of voice and facial expressions that will convey your respect.

## Awaken the Miracles Within You

### The Miracle of Casting Your Burden

*Cast thy burden upon the  
Lord and He shall sustain  
thee.*

*Psalms 55:22*

Cast your burden intelligently. Otherwise you may not get the greatest possible good from the act. Insist on harmony, and peace of mind and quit worrying, then and there.

Then, go about your day to day activities in a peaceful frame of mind as you apply remedies and solve the problems.

Fear of the unknown is a big bluffer. Refuse to be intimidated. Use your mind to find solutions to problems. Then hold on to the fundamental truth that health, happiness, and joy are both eternal and are yours now. No matter what happens, cast your burden and seek harmony and serenity.

*The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.*