

### Understanding Alzheimer's disease

Alzheimer disease is the most common form of dementia. It involves changes in the brain that eventually result in a loss of social and intellectual ability to communicate. Eventually there will be a sharp decline in the person's ability to deal with daily living. According to The Mayo Clinic, 5% of people between 65 and 74 have this disease and almost half have it over age 85. The realization is that there is no cure at this time.

There are many risks that might increase the risk of getting Alzheimer's, included are:

- Heredity
- Age
- More women than men get it
- Alcohol use increases risk
- Atherosclerosis – fatty deposits within the vessels
- Depression
- Diabetes

Signs and symptoms as mentioned by The Mayo Clinic include:

- Planning and organizing disabilities
- Memory loss
- Communication difficulty – This might be searching for words to express self.
- Motor function difficulties
- Agitation
- Inability of reasoning, remembering, learning

- Hallucinations
- Destruction of brain cells
- Repetition
- Depression
- Sleeplessness
- Personality changes may involve;
  - Mood swings
  - Paranoia
  - Anxiety
  - Aggressiveness
  - Social absence

Causes of dementia include brain damage from plaque clumps of protein.

Diagnoses can be made by giving all the symptoms to your Doctor. This can be done by a thorough individual history. It is important that all medications be evaluated along with the family history. A Dr will most likely perform a physical including test of reflexes, coordination, and muscle strength along with muscle tone. There also will be testing of memory, language, including all cognitive abilities. It is only that after death can a definitive diagnosis be made. A Dr can only go by signs and symptoms while an individual is living as to making a diagnosis.

There may be tests ordered, such as brain scans, labs, MRI, CT, PET, and EEG. Note that drugs can only help lessens the symptoms. At the present time there is no cure.

Drugs that might be used but not inclusive:

- Cholinesterase inhibitors - These boost levels for increasing memory and judgment
- Aricept
- Exelon
- Razadyne
- Memantine (Namenda)

Remember that it is important for the individual to get exercise and eat a full balanced meal from all 5 food groups. As always if you have any comments or questions, please eMail me at [gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov](mailto:gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov)