

# Alzheimer's 101

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## Learning Objectives:

- Learn the warning signs of Alzheimer's
- Realize the benefit of early detection
- Learn steps to better your overall brain health

The prevalence of Alzheimer's disease across the United States is staggering. An estimated 5.7 million Americans of all ages are living with Alzheimer's dementia in 2018. This number includes an estimated 5.5 million people age 65 and older and approximately 200,000 individuals under age 65 who have younger-onset Alzheimer's. 1 in every 10 people age 65 and older has Alzheimer's disease. As the size of the older adult population continues to grow, the number of Americans with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias will continue to increase. Today, someone in the United States develops Alzheimer's every 65 seconds. By mid-century, someone in the United States will develop the disease every 33 seconds.

Currently, Alzheimer's disease is the only prominent cause of death that cannot be prevented, slowed, or cured. This, combined with the sheer prevalence of the disease, has led researchers to name Alzheimer's "the biggest health crisis facing the world today." Regardless of the severity of the Alzheimer's crisis, there are steps you can take to better the lives of those who are currently facing, or will face in their future, an Alzheimer's diagnosis. Education and awareness of the disease is key.

Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of aging. It is an irreversible, progressive brain disease that slowly destroys memory and thinking skills and, eventually, the ability to carry out the simplest daily tasks. When understanding Alzheimer's, it is

imperative to note the difference between dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Dementia is a general term used to describe symptoms of loss of intellectual functioning severe enough to interfere with daily life, such as a decline in thinking, memory, or judgment skills. Dementia is not a specific disease and dementia-like symptoms have numerous causes, both reversible and non-reversible, including stroke, thyroid problems, vitamin deficiencies, and Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's disease is the chief cause of dementia-like symptoms, accounting for 60 to 80 percent of all dementia cases. Alzheimer's disease is the cause, and dementia is a symptom of the disease.

### **Steps to Better Brain Health**

Although Alzheimer's disease cannot be prevented, slowed, or cured, there are various steps you can take to live an overall brain-healthy lifestyle. Doing so can improve your overall health and well-being, but may also decrease your risk of cognitive decline as you age. It is best to implement these practices early, and to exercise them throughout your entire life but, it is never too late to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, there are 10 ways to love your brain:

- 1 Break a sweat. Engage in regular exercise for at least 150 minutes per week.
- 2 Hit the books. Take a class online or at your local community center. Formal education at any age can help reduce your risk of cognitive decline.
- 3 Stop smoking. Smoking cigarettes increases your risk for numerous health concerns, including cognitive decline.
- 4 Follow your heart. Risk factors for cardiovascular disease - such as high blood pressure and obesity- also increase your risk for cognitive decline. Living a heart-healthy lifestyle is also best for your brain.
- 5 Heads up! Wear a helmet, use your seatbelt, and prevent fall-related injuries. Protecting your head, and your brain, can help reduce your risk of cognitive decline.

6. Fuel up right. Eat a healthy and balanced diet. Be sure to consume plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
7. Catch some Zzz's. A lack of sleep can contribute to memory loss and trouble thinking. Strive to get 9 hours of sleep per night.
8. Take care of your mental health. Some studies have linked a history of depression with an increased risk of cognitive decline. If you have symptoms of depression, or are unsure, seek advice from a doctor.
9. Buddy up. Staying social throughout your lifespan may support better brain health. Get together with friends, engage in your favorite hobbies, volunteer, and be a part of your local community.
10. Stump yourself. Challenge your brain! Playing cards, doing puzzles, and trying new things - such as building a piece of furniture or learning a new skill- can have numerous brain boosting benefits.

## Conclusion

Alzheimer's disease is a worldwide crisis until a medical breakthrough occurs. Because of current restrictions in pharmacological treatments, the best advice that can be given to anyone experiencing cognitive changes is to see your doctor as soon as possible. It might not be Alzheimer's disease, but if it is, there are steps that you can take to prepare yourself and your loved ones for a life with Alzheimer's disease. Be proactive in your own health care.

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