

Your Health Reference Sheet

Topic: Alzheimer's Disease

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In researching the topic, it became obvious that we need to learn more about this disease because baby-boomers are entering into their memory loss years in record numbers, and their parents are living longer; so the kinds of assisted care needs required are changing. In my research, I came across some startling statistics: *Every 70 seconds, someone in the United States is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Over 5.1 million Americans are now experiencing Alzheimer's disease. More than 20 million baby boomers are expected to develop the disease in the next 10 years.* With statistics like these, it certainly is a front-burner topic.

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive degeneration of brain tissue that's marked by a devastating mental decline. These mental declines include the loss of intellectual functions such as memory, comprehension, and speech. They include attention issues where thoughts tends to stray, simple calculations become impossible, and ordinary daily activities become increasingly difficult. There are dramatic mood swings such as outbursts of anger, bouts of fearfulness, periods of bewilderment, extreme frustration, and long periods of apathy. Physical problems occur, as well, such as an odd gait, the loss of coordination, incontinence, and, ultimately, the person becoming completely, physically helpless.

Alzheimer's disease is the leading cause of dementia in the United States and is the fourth leading cause of death in developed nations, after heart disease, cancer, and stroke. This disease can run its course from insidious onset to death in just a few years, or it can develop slowly over a period lasting as long as 20 years. The average duration is about seven years. As age advances, the risk of developing this disease rises sharply and by the age of 80, about one person in three has the disease. Women are twice as susceptible as men, and Caucasians are about four times as susceptible as African Americans.

However, even with these staggering statistics, there is hope and there are changes you can make in your lifestyle, your diet, and in your mental activities that can ward off this dreaded disease and make it possible for you to live a very long, mentally healthy life. Dharma Singh Khalsa, MD, president and medical director of the Alzheimer's Prevention Foundation in Tucson, Arizona, believes that nutritional counseling; physical exercise; cognitive exercise; mind-body stress control techniques; hormone replacement such as testosterone, growth hormone, and DHEA; psychological counseling; and brain-supportive nutritional and herbal supplements can prevent the onset of Alzheimer's disease.