

I have Alzheimer's disease



I have alzheimer's disease what should i know, what should i do?

### **What is happening to me?**

Alzheimer's disease causes gradual, irreversible changes in the brain. These changes usually cause problems with memory, decision making and self-care. The disease also affects the ways we communicate – both in expressing our thoughts and in understanding what others are saying. You may be worried or anxious about the changes you've noticed so far. While there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, treatments might help you with some of your symptoms. And having information about the disease can help you cope.

### **It's important to know that:**

- The changes you are experiencing are because of the disease
- You will have good days and bad days
- The disease affects each person differently, and symptoms will vary
- Trying different ideas will help you find comfortable ways to cope
- Some suggestions may work for you, others may not
- You are not alone – other people suffer from Alzheimer's
- People who understand what you are going through can help you and your family

### **1- What can I do?**

#### **Coping with memory loss**

While you may clearly remember things that happened long ago, recent events can be quickly forgotten. You may have trouble keeping track of time, people and places. You may forget appointments or people's names. It might be very frustrating trying to remember where you put things.

#### **Suggestions for coping with memory loss:**

- Keep a book of important notes with you at all times that has:
  - Important telephone numbers and addresses, including emergency numbers and your own contact information
  - People's names and their relationships to you
  - A "To do" list of appointments
  - A map showing where your home is
  - Thoughts or ideas you want to hold on to
- Label cupboards and drawers with words or pictures that describe their contents, such as dishes and silverware, or sweaters and socks
- Get an easy-to-read, digital clock that displays the time and date, and keep it in a prominent place
- Post phone numbers in large print next to the telephone; include emergency numbers
- Have a dependable friend call to remind you about meal times, appointments and medication
- Keep a set of photos of people you see regularly; label the photos with names and what each does
- Keep track of the date by marking off each day on a calendar
- Use pillboxes to help you organize your medication; pillboxes with sections for times of day – like morning and evening – can help remind you when you should take your pills

**Finding your way**

Sometimes, things that were once familiar to you may now seem unfamiliar. A favorite place may not look the same. Or you might get lost.

**Suggestions for finding your way:**

- Take someone with you when you go out
- Don't be afraid to ask for help
- Explain to others that you have a memory problem and need assistance

**Doing daily tasks**

You may find familiar activities more difficult. For example, you may have trouble balancing a checkbook, following a recipe or doing simple household repairs.

**Suggestions for doing daily tasks:**

- Give yourself a lot of time, and don't let others hurry you
  - Take a break if something is too difficult
  - Ask for help if you need it
  - Arrange for others to help you with difficult tasks
  - Maintain a daily routine
- Over time, certain things may become too difficult for you to do at all. This is because of the disease. Do the best you can, and accept help when it's available.

**Talking to others**

You may have difficulty understanding what others are saying. You may have trouble finding the right words to express your thoughts.

**Suggestions for talking to others:**

- Take your time
- Tell people you have difficulty with thinking, communicating and remembering
- Consider with whom you will share your diagnosis – it can be helpful for family and friends to understand your condition
- Ask the person to repeat a statement if you did not understand what was said
- Find a quiet place to converse if loud noises or crowds are bothering you

**2- Is what I'm feeling normal?**

Living with the changes caused by Alzheimer's disease can bring about many unfamiliar emotions. These feelings are a natural response to the disease. It is important to share these reactions with others. Tell someone with whom you are comfortable how you feel.

**You may find yourself saying:**

"I worry more than usual."

It is important to talk to your family and friends about your concerns. You may worry about what is going to happen to you in the future. Or you may wonder how quickly the disease will progress. While there are no definite answers to these questions, most people find that doing something they enjoy – like walking or gardening – helps them take their minds off their worries.

"I sometimes think I'm going crazy."

The disease can make you feel as if you are losing control. Telling those around you how you feel may give you comfort. Sharing your feelings with others who have Alzheimer's may also help.

"I sometimes get into a bad mood."

It is normal to experience mood changes. On these days, it is important to remember that tomorrow may be a better day. Try to do things that will lift your spirits.

"Sometimes I feel angry."

Feeling angry is OK. Sometimes being part of a support group or talking to a counselor who knows about Alzheimer's disease can help. Your doctor can refer you.

"I sometimes feel sad."

You may feel sadness when faced with the changes that the disease brings to your life. It may help to spend time with friends or family, or to do something you enjoy. Consider consulting your doctor about medications that may help ease feelings of sadness.

"When things go wrong, I feel really embarrassed."

Getting lost, forgetting a once familiar face or not being able to find the right word can feel embarrassing. But this is a part of the disease. Explain to people that you have memory problems to help ease any awkward feelings. Keeping a sense of humor, whenever possible, can also be very helpful.

"I get so frustrated."

Not being able to do the things you once did can be frustrating. Talk to others about why you are feeling this way. See if there is anything that you, or those around you, can do to make things easier.

"Sometimes I feel very lonely."

You may think that the people around you don't understand what you're going through.

"I feel guilty asking for help."

Few of us like to ask others for help. We often resist relying on others. Over time, you will find it necessary to ask for help more often. Try to accept the help you need. Chances are that others will be pleased to be of assistance.

It's normal to go through a range of emotions. You're facing many challenges and adjustments. The important thing is to find ways to cope with these feelings that make you feel better.

### 3- How else can I take care of myself?

Two of the most important ways to maintain your well-being are to stay healthy and safe.

#### Health

Take good care of your body.

#### Suggestions for your health:

- Rest when you are tired
- Exercise regularly, with your doctor's approval
- Eat properly
- Cut down on alcohol – it can make your symptoms worse
- Take your medications as prescribed, and ask for help if it is difficult to remember when medication should be taken



- Reduce stress in your daily life

### Safety

The gradual loss of memory can bring new concerns about safety. So, too, can difficulties with decision making and communications.

### Suggestions for your safety:

Consider a companion

The person you live with may worry about leaving you alone for long periods of time.

While you may feel you will be fine alone, having a companion can help the time pass more pleasantly. It can also lessen worry for your loved ones. Stop driving when it's no longer safe. Loss of memory can hinder your ability to be a safe driver. You may also become less able to make decisions and react quickly. While it is not easy to give up your license, at some point it will no longer be safe for you to drive.

## 4- What if I live on my own?

Many people with Alzheimer's continue to live successfully on their own during the early stages of the disease. Making simple adjustments, taking safety precautions and having the support of others can make things easier.

### Suggestions for living on your own:

- Talk to your doctor about where to get help for things like housekeeping, meals or transportation
- Inform your bank if you have difficulty with record-keeping and keeping track of your accounts
- Arrange for direct deposits of checks, such as your retirement pension
- Plan for home-delivered meals, if they are available in your community
- Have a family member regularly sort your closet and dresser drawers to make it easier for you to get dressed
- Leave a set of house keys with a neighbor you trust
- Schedule family or friends to make a daily call or visit; keep a list of things you can discuss

At some point, it will become too difficult or dangerous for you to live alone. Make plans now for where you will live as the disease progresses. You may want to live with relatives or move to a residential care setting.

## 5- What about the future?

Because Alzheimer's disease is a progressive illness, the symptoms you are experiencing will gradually worsen. You will need more help.

There is no way to predict how or when this will happen. It is a good idea for you to make decisions about your future as early in the course of the disease as possible.

### Suggestions for future plans:

Make arrangements at work

- Talk to your employer about Alzheimer's disease and your symptoms, and take someone with you to help you explain and clarify your situation
- Cut down on your hours or responsibilities if possible
- If you own your own business, put plans in place for its future operations

### **Consider future living arrangements**

- Talk to your family or friends about where you want to live, and with whom, to prepare for the time when you will need more care
- Consider all of the options available

### **Settle your money and legal matters**

- Consider naming a person to make health care decisions for you when you are unable to do so; this person should know your wishes about your health care and future living arrangements
- Make sure your money matters are in the hands of someone you trust, like your spouse, your child or a close friend
- See a lawyer about naming a person to legally take care of your money matters when you can no longer do it
- Take someone with you to the lawyer to help explain your situation and to interpret all that the lawyer says

Planning ahead assures that your future will be in good hands. It also helps your loved ones make the right decisions for you in the future.

### **10 quick tips Living with Alzheimer's**

1. Carry with you a book of important notes/photos
2. Talk to your doctor about options
3. Be open to accepting help from others
4. Keep doing the things you most enjoy
5. Talk to others who have Alzheimer's
6. Find ways to laugh as often as you can
7. Maintain your physical health
8. Take steps to make your home safe
9. Extend the time you can live safely in your home with help from your family, friends and community
10. Put plans in place now for your future