

Courtesy of: Royalty Owner Help Desk


 Eldercare

By the numbers

- **About 5.3 million** Americans have Alzheimer's disease today. That number is estimated to reach 7.7 million by 2030.¹
- **13% of people** age 65 and older have Alzheimer's disease.²
- **It is estimated that 1 to 4** family members act as caregivers for each individual with Alzheimer's disease.²

¹ Source: alz.org² Source: alzfdn.org

How to help a loved one with Alzheimer's disease

Is a person close to you suffering from Alzheimer's disease, or are you concerned that he or she may be? Alzheimer's disease is an increasingly common disorder. Learn about its symptoms, what to do if someone you love may have Alzheimer's disease, and what to expect as the disease progresses through its natural phases.

The person who used to care for you now needs care himself or herself. Family relationships are often flipped as parents become childlike and children take care of their parents. A caregiving spouse may take on the all-consuming, full-time role of unpaid caregiver for an Alzheimer's patient.

Approximately 5.3 million American men and women have Alzheimer's disease,¹ a progressive, age-related brain disease that affects thinking, memory, language, and behavior. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia among the elderly. It usually affects people gradually. But, over time, it can take quite a toll on the patient and on that person's entire network of family members and caregivers, who are often one and the same.

Warning signs of Alzheimer's disease

How do you know if someone may have Alzheimer's disease? Several common signs of mild Alzheimer's disease are:

- repeating a question again and again
- repeating a story word for word
- forgetting how to do basic everyday activities, such as cooking, making repairs, or playing card games
- becoming unable to pay bills or balance a checkbook
- getting lost in familiar places
- neglecting to bathe or shower and wearing the same clothes repeatedly, and insisting otherwise

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Key points

- Alzheimer's disease is different from normal age-related slight memory loss. Look for a number of signs that could indicate Alzheimer's disease before assuming anyone has the disease.
- It is believed that staying active physically and mentally and eating nutritiously can ward off or delay Alzheimer's disease.
- If someone close to you has a mild case of Alzheimer's disease, now is the time to take legal and financial actions, such as drawing a power of attorney or a health care proxy, before the person's mental capacity has declined.



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- becoming confused and forgetting the names of people, places, recent events, and/or appointments
- relying on others to make decisions for them, which they previously would have done themselves

Differentiating Alzheimer’s disease from normal memory loss

One of the first signs of the disease is the loss of short-term memory. For example, someone may forget about recent conversations or events. But some loss of memory is common as we all age. The normal minor, age-related loss of memory is known as “age-associated memory impairment” (AAMI). AAMI is different from dementia, including Alzheimer’s disease, in that it does not progressively worsen, nor does it tend to disable people the way Alzheimer’s disease does.

Common changes as the disease progresses

Alzheimer’s is a slowly progressing disease. It starts with mild memory loss and ends with severe brain damage. The course of the disease varies, as does its rate of progression. On average, Alzheimer’s disease patients live for 4 to 6 years after they are diagnosed. However, the disease can last much longer.

Middle stage – As Alzheimer’s disease progresses, the changes become more noticeable. The person will need more help with day-to-day living. They may need to be reminded about eating, washing, or changing clothes. They may fail to recognize people or confuse them with others. They may become easily upset, frustrated, or aggressive.

Other middle-stage symptoms include

- wandering off and getting lost
- mixing up night and day
- experiencing hallucinations, such as seeing, hearing, smelling, or tasting things that are not there
- being restless as exhibited by pacing, trying doorknobs, or touching draperies
- becoming a safety risk if left alone because of forgetfulness, such as forgetting to light the gas after turning on a stove or forgetting to shut it off

Severe or late stage – In the most advanced stage, a person with Alzheimer’s disease will become totally dependent on others for nursing care. The person may be unable to recognize familiar objects, surroundings, or even close relatives.

Other late-stage indications include

- being difficult to understand, speaking gibberish
- being physically frail
- losing weight
- losing control of bowel and bladder
- being too unsteady or weak to walk or stand alone
- crying out, groaning, screaming, or mumbling loudly
- sleeping more

Diagnosis, treatment, and care

No single factor has been identified as the cause of Alzheimer’s disease. A combination of factors may contribute, including age, genetics, environment, diet, and overall health. Diagnosis is

often made by ruling out other causes of symptoms. There is currently no cure for Alzheimer’s disease. But some drug treatments may ease the symptoms or slow the disease’s progress among people with mild or moderate dementia.

When caring for someone with Alzheimer’s disease, it is good to try to help the patient live as independently as possible for as long as possible. Although you may be tempted to do things for them, people with dementia are more likely to retain a sense of self-worth if they are given the chance to do things on their own. You can help by providing support if necessary, including emotional support and reassurance. As the dementia progresses, the person may need more help with everyday activities, including washing, bathing, and dressing. Eventually, you may have to consider external resources.

What you can do to maintain your brain

Although Alzheimer’s disease has no cure yet, research has indicated that lifestyle changes can lessen your chances of developing the disease or delay its onset. The Alzheimer’s Association’s “Maintain Your Brain” campaign advocates physical and mental exercise, good nutrition, and general healthy habits.

- **Physical exercise** – Stay active, walk every day, work out.
- **Mental stimulation** – Read, converse, work on crossword puzzles, play Scrabble, play cards, take a class.



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- **Nutrition** – In addition to a well-rounded diet, take a multivitamin that includes folic acid, vitamins E and C, and eat foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids.
- **Good health habits** – Maintain a healthy body weight, keep your blood pressure and cholesterol level low, and avoid smoking.

What you can do medically

If you are concerned that you or someone close to you could have Alzheimer’s disease, see your family doctor. Your general practitioner may ask a specialist, such as a psychiatrist or neurologist, for help in the diagnosis. An early diagnosis could help you plan and identify sources of advice and support and may lead to earlier access to treatments.

There is no single diagnostic test for Alzheimer’s disease. But a complete medical and neurological evaluation will help your doctor rule out other possibilities such as infection, vitamin deficiency, depression, thyroid problems, or brain tumors. A brain scan — such as a computerized tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) — may help indicate what is happening within the person’s brain. Other medical tests include blood work, urinalysis, electroencephalogram (EEG), along with tests on the person’s memory and thinking skills.

Medical care for Alzheimer’s patients can be provided at home by relatives or by health care professionals, such as

social workers, nurses, therapists, and case managers. It also can be provided in an adult day care or nursing home. As the disease progresses, you may explore all of these options.

What you can do legally and financially

Because Alzheimer’s disease involves a predictable decline in a person’s mental capacity, it is important to use the time wisely before the person is no longer able to make important decisions about his or her life and assets. Once a person with Alzheimer’s is no longer mentally competent, it is too late to designate someone to make his or her decisions regarding health care, financial planning, and estate planning.

Consider taking these steps soon:

- **An advance directive** – This could be a power of attorney or a health care proxy. A power of attorney will allow someone else to make key decisions regarding financial and estate planning. A health care proxy will empower family members or close friends to make health care decisions as needed.
- **Estate inventory** – Before conducting estate planning, take a snapshot of the resources the person has available, including income and assets, health insurance, and community resources.
- **Estate planning** – Have an estate planning expert create or update a

will and other estate planning documents such as a living will or trust.

For more information on estate planning see the *10 important estate planning steps* brochure on mfs.com. Click “Education & Planning,” then “MFS Heritage Planning,” followed by “Estate Planning,” and finally “10 important estate planning steps.”

Resources

Alzheimer’s Disease Education and Referral Center (ADEAR)

nia.nih.gov/alzheimers

Alzheimer’s Association

alz.org

Alzheimer’s Foundation of America

alzfdn.org

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