

Understanding Alzheimer's (in 3 parts)

by Kim Bollom, Guest Writer



Guest writer, Kim Bollom, is a Registered Nurse of 14 years and specializes in educating newly graduated nurses who are transitioning from nursing school into their first professional nursing role. Kim spent the first seven years of her career on Active Duty in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, where she learned more about herself that she ever thought possible.

Outside of work, Kim loves studying the Bible and teaching her kids the incredible impact God can make on the world. She loves all things “home” – interior decorating, designing and creating handmade signs and having a glass of wine and good conversation with friends.

The information provided is general in nature and may vary from individual to individual. It is provided by a credentialed volunteer for purposes of education and is not verified by LCCC. Readers are invited to do their own research and consult care providers regarding their particular issues.

The Warning Signs of Alzheimer's (Part 1 of 3)

Many times, forgetfulness and memory loss are shrugged off as a normal part of aging. While the brain does experience normal aging – there are reasons to be familiar with what is normal and when to become concerned.

Alzheimer's is a progressive brain disease that affects memory, cognition and eventually the ability to perform normal daily tasks. Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging. Alzheimer's can be tricky to detect but even minor warning signs should not be ignored.

Warning signs of Alzheimer's:	Normal signs of aging:
Difficulty recalling names, conversations, dates, events (i.e. asking the same questions over and over).	Forgetting appointments but recalling them later
Unable to follow a routine tasks or plan (i.e. unable to recall a favorite recipe)	Occasionally needing assistance using a household item (i.e. TV, microwave, etc.)
Losing track of dates, time, seasons, or events that are not occurring in that moment (i.e. recalling where they are or how they got there)	Forgetting the day of the week but recalling it later
Vision problems that lead to falling or difficulty driving	Vision changes that are treatable (i.e. cataracts)
Struggling with familiar vocabulary	Difficulty finding the right words to use on occasion
Losing items and being unable to retrace steps to locate them	Temporarily displacing items but appropriately retracing steps to locate item.
Decrease in sound decision making (i.e. paying bills, keeping up with hygiene)	Occasional poor decisions (i.e. forgetting to have car maintenance performed)
Consistent withdrawal from social interaction	Occasional disinterest in social interactions
Increased mood changes (i.e. confusion, depression, anxious)	Mood changes present when routine is disrupted but resumes to normal thereafter

If you or a loved one are experiencing warning signs of Alzheimer's, seek out care with your primary care physician.

Alzheimer's Disease Causes and Risk Factors (*Part 2 of 3*)

Alzheimer's disease causes and risk factors:

- Adults older than 65 years (age is the highest risk factor)
- If you have inherited certain genetic mutations that lead to Alzheimer's, you are almost certain to inherit the disease.
- Family history of early-onset Alzheimer's (first degree relatives – parents, siblings)
- Individual's diagnosed with Down's Syndrome tend to have a higher instance of Alzheimer's disease and tend to start showing warning signs much earlier in life (around 40 years old).
- Black and Hispanic populations

While there have been no studies that have been able to break the code in preventing or curing Alzheimer's, studies have identified some risk factors that have been tied to an increase risk of Alzheimer's such as:

- Cardiovascular disease:
 - Prevention is key! Manage your weight - eating heart healthy foods, exercise regularly, quit smoking, treat and/or manage high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes.
- Quality of sleep:
 - Make sure to try to get at least 8 hours of restful sleep each night.
- Head injuries:
 - Safety first! Avoid head injuries by always wearing seat belt, helmet and taking steps to prevent falling.
- Mental health:
 - Stay mindful of your mental health! Stress and depression have been linked to a decline in cognition – so see your doctor if you are experiencing anxiety or depression.
- Challenge your mind:
 - Enroll in classes at a local college - studies have revealed higher education levels can decrease the risk for Alzheimer's disease.
 - Take up a new hobby such as jigsaw puzzles, building furniture or arts and crafts.
 - Play complex games with friends (chess, bridge and other games that require strategic thinking).
- Become socially active:
 - Connect with others in a way that is meaningful to you – stay engaged with your friends, family and loved ones.

Combine as many as possible to achieve maximum prevention results

If you or a loved one are concerned about your risk factors related to Alzheimer's, seek out care with your primary care physician for regular checkups and monitoring.

Did You Know? (Part 3 of 3)

Did you know?

- Alzheimer's disease can progress very slowly over the span of your lifetime. Unnoticeable changes in your brain can begin as early as 20 years before symptoms such as memory loss arise.
- Other types of dementia are often diagnosed as Alzheimer's, however dementia is not always Alzheimer's. Dementia-like symptoms can also be caused by depression, anxiety, Lyme disease, lack of sleep (i.e. sleep apnea), thyroid disease, vitamin deficiencies, and excessive alcohol consumption. These types of dementia are treatable.
- If you are enrolled in Medicare, you can receive evaluations that can detect Alzheimer's annually at no cost.
- Studies reveal that none of the medications currently used for individuals with Alzheimer's have shown to slow or stop the progression of the disease. Although, after years of scientific research, scientists are being led to believe that future treatment plans of Alzheimer's will include initiating treatment before Alzheimer warning signs are even noticeable.
- Recent studies have shown that proactively identifying and modifying risk factors could reduce the risk of Alzheimer's by 40%!
- Taking care of your heart simultaneously takes care of your brain – taking care of your heart helps your body provide the nutrient and oxygen rich blood your brain needs to stay healthy.
- Millions of Americans have been affected by the painstaking disease – support is available to those affected by Alzheimer's, their families and caregivers. and have sought out Alzheimer's support groups in your area can be found at: <https://www.alz.org/help-support>

If you or a loved one have questions regarding Alzheimer's, seek out care with your primary care physician.

References:

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