

November is National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month

Memory decline may seem like a normal part of aging, but it could be a sign of Alzheimer's, a fatal brain disease that results in a slow deterioration in memory, thinking and reasoning skills. Anyone may occasionally experience memory loss. If you notice any of the signs below occurring more frequently in yourself or a loved one, please consult a doctor for further evaluation.

Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease:

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life such as forgetting recently learned important dates or events; asking for the same information over and over; or relying on family members for things you used to handle on your own. A typical age-related change is sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.
- Challenges in planning or solving problems like being able to follow a recipe or keeping track of monthly bills. Having difficulty concentrating or taking much longer to do familiar tasks may also occur. A typical age-related change is making occasional errors when balancing a checkbook.
- Difficulty completing familiar daily tasks such as forgetting how to drive to or from work, the golf course or grocery store; forgetting how to play a favorite card game; or managing a budget at work. A typical age-related change is occasionally needing help with using the settings on the microwave or recording a TV show.
- Confusion with time or place. People with Alzheimer's may lose track of seasons or the passage of time. They may forget where they are, how long they've been there or how they got there. A typical age-related change is walking into a room in your house and forgetting why you went into that room.
- New problems with speaking like having difficulty following a conversation or stopping in the middle of a conversation and not recalling how to continue or repeating yourself. Using odd names like calling a watch a hand-clock. A typical age-related change is sometimes having trouble finding the right word to say in a conversation.
- Misplacing things by putting things away in unusual places or not being able to retrace steps to find them or accusing others of stealing. A typical age-related change is misplacing a pair of eyeglasses, car keys or the remote control from time to time.
- Using poor judgment when dealing with money or paying less attention to daily hygiene like bathing, combing hair, brushing teeth or wearing clean clothes. A typical age-related change is making a bad decision once in a while.
- Withdrawal from work or social activities such as not doing a hobby because you don't remember how to complete it or avoiding social contact because you don't feel comfortable interacting with others. A typical age-related change is canceling a social event due to being tired from work or other family obligations.
- Changes in mood or personality including confusion, depression, fearfulness or anxiety. People with Alzheimer's often become easily upset or agitated at home, with friends or in places where they are out of their comfort zone. A typical age-related change is becoming irritable when a regular routine is disrupted like having to dine at 7pm instead of your usual 5pm.

You can reduce your risk of memory decline by participating in mentally-challenging activities on a regular basis such as working on puzzles, learning a new language or playing a musical instrument. Researchers also recommend engaging in daily physical activity to help control blood pressure, diabetes and weight. Developing a strong social network and staying connected with friends and family are other preventive steps for lowering risk of dementia and Alzheimer's Disease.

For more information about dementia or the many caregiver support groups offered in Southeastern Wisconsin, call the Alzheimer's Association at 414-479-8800. The 24/7 Helpline is also available at 800-272-3900. Two additional online resources are the Family Caregiver Support Network at www.caregiversupportnetwork.org or the Living Options Service at www.living-options.org.

