

ALZHEIMER



Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia that affects memory and thinking skills. It is a progressive disease that, so far, has no cure and is the leading cause of dementia in people over the age of 65. Dementia is defined as the loss of mental functioning that includes thinking, remembering, and reasoning to such a degree that it interferes with daily life and activities.

What causes it?

It is not known what causes Alzheimer's, however, the development of the disease is attributed to a complex series of events that occur in the brain over a long period of time and may be associated with age, genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors.

Signs and symptoms

The first signs of Alzheimer's disease are detected when changes in memory occur. Usually, people with memory problems have a condition called mild cognitive impairment. Those who have this condition are at higher risk of developing Alzheimer's, however, it does not occur in all cases.

Among the signs that can be detected are those that include difficulty in different areas of mental function such as:

- Language
- Memory
- Perception
- Thinking
- Behavior or personality

Alzheimer's disease is classified into three categories according to the symptoms presented:

Mild Alzheimer

- Recent memory loss
- Difficulty managing money and paying bills
- Repeating questions
- Taking more time than usual to complete daily tasks
- Difficulty naming objects
- Slight changes in mood and personality

Moderate Alzheimer

- Changes in language, reasoning, sensory processing, and thinking
- Increased memory loss and confusion
- Failure to recognize family and friends
- Difficulty in carrying out tasks that involve a process like: taking a bath or getting dressed
- Hallucinations, delusions, and paranoia occur
- Compulsive and repetitive behavior

Severe Alzheimer

- May lose the ability to speak clearly
- Depend on others for care
- Spend most of their time in bed as their body stops functioning
- Do not recognize their family members and/or friends
- Have difficulty in swallowing

How is it diagnosed?

- Your physician may ask you about your ability to perform daily activities, use of prescription and over-the-counter drugs, diet, behavioral changes, and personality.
- Through tests related to memory, problem solving ability, and language skills.
- Through medical examinations, laboratories to rule out other causes and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

Early diagnosis can help you begin treatment to help maintain mental function and control the progression of memory loss.

How is it treated?

- **Drugs** – Your physician may prescribe medications to help you maintain skills related to memory, speech, thinking, and behavior. However, they may only help you temporarily since the disease is progressive.
- **Symptom management** - managing the most common symptoms such as insomnia, agitation, wandering, anxiety, anger, and depression has been found to make people more comfortable and it makes it easier for caregivers to care for them.



This article has been approved by the Alzheimer's Association of Puerto Rico for more information and support groups you can call 787.727.4151.

For more information about this or any other health condition contact:

MCS Medilínea • 1.866.727.6271

24 hours / 7 days a week

References:

Alzheimer Disease. National Institute on Aging

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers-disease-fact-sheet>

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