**Care & Help, LLC. Home Care Agency**

**1051 County Line Rd.**

**Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006**

**Tel: (267) 778-9180 ~ Fax: (215) 689-4274**

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**Dementia & Alzheimer’s Learning Guide**

Dementia

* Impairment of brain function (decline in intellectual functioning) that increases with routine daily activities
* Mental disorders caused by changes in the brain
* Patients with Dementia are confused and disoriented (confused to person, place, or time)
* Dementia is not a normal change of aging



Causes and Types of Dementia

* ***Reversible***: May be caused by vitamin deficiency, metal poisoning, or depression.
* ***Irreversible***: May sometimes be controlled by treatments or medication but not cured. Multi-infarct Dementia, Alzheimer’s disease
* Other illness or diseases that can cause Dementia: AIDS, brain injuries, tumors, infections

Alzheimer’s disease

* Alzheimer’s disease is a progressive nervous disorder that can overtime destroy all mental and physical function
* It is the most common cause of Dementia, affecting over 4 million Americans
* It affects both men and women of all racial, economic, and social groups

Causes of Alzheimer’s disease

* The cause of Alzheimer’s is not known
* Researchers have found that having a close relative with AD increases a person’s risk of developing the disease
* At age 80, a person has a 50% higher risk of developing AD
* A person with 1 parent having the disease has a 36% higher risk
* A person with 2 parents having the disease has a 54% higher risk

Environmental Factors

* Studies with identical twins show environment doesn’t play a part in developing Alzheimer’s disease- researchers do not understand why or how
* People who have suffered head injuries (with loss of consciousness) develop AD at 3x the rate of other adults
* Aluminum- researchers have discounted the ingestion of aluminum salts as a cause of AD.
* Virus- research is being done to see if AD is triggered by a hidden virus
* Studies also show that the following factors can affect a person’s risk of developing AD
* The geographic area where you live (Higher in Guam)
* Your mother’s age at your birth

Signs and symptoms

* Alzheimer’s disease has a gradual onset
* The first clue is a change in the person’s behavior
* Mild forgetfulness leads to problems finding:
	+ the right word
	+ Inability to recognize objects
	+ Inability to use simple objects
* It may take months for the family to notice something is wrong
* Eventually friends, family, or co-workers start to notice things like:
	+ Increasing and persistent forgetfulness
	+ Mild personality changes
	+ Minor disorientation
	+ Frequently loses or misplaces familiar items
	+ Has mild difficultly finding the right word
	+ Has mild difficultly performing familiar tasks
	+ Disorientation of time and place
	+ Poor or decreased judgement
	+ Loss of initiative
	+ Difficulties performing arithmetic calculations

Diagnosis of Alzheimer’s

* Alzheimer’s disease is diagnosed by exclusion
* Medical history- the doctor gathers pertinent medical information (illness, operations, family history, nutritional and lifestyle information)
* Physical exam- the doctor performs a complete physical exam
* Neurological examination- the Dr. will order special tests such as a brain scan, EEG, or an MRI
* Psychological examination- the Dr. will refer the person to a Psychiatrist
* Laboratory tests- the doctors will have lab work done to eliminate other possible diseases
* Evidence of characteristics of Alzheimer’s disease- The doctor will look at the time frame for the confusion and behaviors of the person
* If everything else is ruled out, then the doctor will make the diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease
* The only positive diagnosis is made with microscopic examination of the brain tissue – This can only be done on autopsy

Stages of Alzheimer’s disease: Early Stage

* This stage can last for 2 to 4 years
* A person in this state may be aware of the diagnosis or know that something is wrong
* A person in the early stage may still be able to participate in decisions affecting their future
* Medications given for Alzheimer’s disease try to prolong the early stage of the disease rather than cure it
* Behavior associated with the early stage:
	+ Mild forgetfulness (names, what has been said, recent events)
	+ Difficulty processing new information
	+ Learning new things
	+ Following conversations
	+ Problems with orientation
	+ Becomes easily lost
	+ Trouble following directions
	+ Date and time
	+ Communication
	+ Finding the right words
	+ Using proper grammar
	+ Pronouncing words
	+ Disinterest in grooming
	+ Overreaction to stress
* Sundowner’s Syndrome:
	+ Increase in problem behavior as the sun sets in the evening
	+ May occur because the patient is tired at the end of the day or the person be may afraid of the dark
	+ Plan activities for the early part of the day
* Hoarding
	+ Person gathers items and hides them
	+ They may forget where they put things and accuse another person of stealing them
	+ If possible, have an extra pair of glasses or hearing aid
	+ Distract the person from worrying about the item so they will not have a catastrophic reaction

Stages of Alzheimer’s disease: Middle Stage

* This stage may last from 2 to 10 year
* This is the stage where some people with AD become restless and pace or wander
* People in this stage may need help with many daily tasks- dressing, bathing, using the toilet
* Caregiver may have difficulty as care becomes more difficult
* Behavior associated with the middle stage:
	+ Continued memory lapses
	+ Forgetfulness about personal history
	+ Inability to recognize friends and family
	+ Confusion
	+ Anxiety
	+ Suspicions
	+ Sadness/depression
	+ Hostility
	+ Decline in concentration abilities
	+ Restlessness
	+ Pacing
	+ Wandering
	+ Repetition
	+ Delusions
	+ Aggression
	+ Assistance required for daily tasks
* If a patient is wandering:
	+ Keep environment safe
	+ Make sure patient gets enough exercise
	+ Distract the person to another activity
* Delusions and Hallucinations
	+ Delusions- a false belief
	+ Hallucinations – sensing something that is not there
	+ Avoid Direct confrontation
	+ Do not agree that you see that hallucination or insist that it was unreal
	+ Reassure the person that you are there to care for him/her
* Catastrophic reaction
	+ Person over-reacts to a situation by becoming very agitated, angry, or emotional
	+ Happens because the person has too much stimuli at one time
	+ Try to prevent the person from having a reaction if possible
	+ Keep environment simple
	+ Do tasks in small steps
	+ Stay calm yourself
	+ Try to distract the person to another activity

Stages of Alzheimer’s disease: Late/End Stage

* This stage usually lasts from one to three years
* This person will need 24-hour a day care
* The person will eventually become bedridden and become incontinent
* Behavior associated with the late stage:
	+ Loss of ability to remember, communicate, or function
	+ Inability to process information
	+ Severe disorientation about time, place and people
	+ Withdrawal
	+ Must use non-verbal methods to communicate
	+ May respond to music or touch
	+ Becomes bed-ridden
	+ Loses ability to speak
	+ Becomes incontinent
	+ Inability to swallow
	+ May become unresponsive (coma)
	+ Ends in death