



**The Basics of
Alzheimer's Disease**
Practical Information to Help You in
Your Care Giving Role

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What is Dementia?

- Not a disease or complete diagnosis.
- A set of symptoms, which can include:
 - Memory Loss
 - Problems with language
 - Confusion
 - Changes in visual or spatial perception
 - Poor or Decreased judgment
 - Problems with thinking, planning and organizing tasks
 - Changes in mood or behavior
 - Changes in personality

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**What Causes Dementia or
Dementia-like Symptoms?**

- Irreversible
 - Alzheimer's Disease (most common)
 - Vascular dementia
 - Parkinson's Disease (Lewy Body dementia)
 - Frontotemporal or Pick's disease
 - Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease
- Reversible or Treatable
 - Brain Tumor
 - Normal pressure hydrocephalus (NPH)
 - Infection
 - Vitamin deficiency
 - Depression
 - Medication side-effects or reaction

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What is Alzheimer's Disease?



Alzheimer's is an irreversible, progressive brain disease that destroys brain cells.

Although the risk of developing Alzheimer's increases with age, it is not a normal part of aging.

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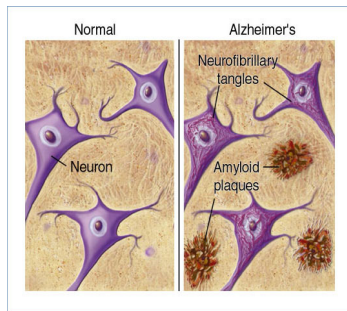
What are Plaques & Tangles?

Plaques:

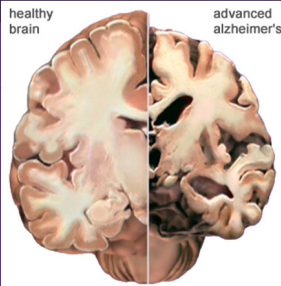
Abnormal clusters of the protein **beta amyloid** build up between nerve cells and lead to cell death

Tangles:

Strands of a protein called **tau**, essential for maintaining cell structure, collapse leading to cell destruction.



Brain changes



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Stages of Alzheimer's Disease

- **Mild or Early Stage**
 - Noticeable word or name problems
 - Forgets material just read
 - Losing or misplacing things
- **Moderate**
 - Repeats same question numerous times
 - May become confused about where they are
 - Need help or supervision with day-to-day activities
- **Late or Severe**
 - Need help dressing properly or using bathroom
 - Trouble remembering names of family or friends
 - Difficulty walking and need assist to eat

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Treating the Cognitive Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease

- FDA-approved drugs for cognitive symptoms:
 - Donepezil (Aricept) for mild/moderate/severe
 - Rivastigmine (Exelon) for mild/moderate
 - Galantamine (Razadyne) for mild/moderate
 - Memantine (Namenda) for moderate/severe

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Other Dementia Symptoms Responsive to Medical Treatment

- Depression
- Anxiety, restlessness or agitation
- Sleep disturbances or problems
- Delusions or hallucinations



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Successful communication is the ability to look past the disease and make a connection with the person.



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Communication Challenges for the person with dementia

1. word finding difficulty
2. repetition
3. loss of reading and writing ability
4. reverting to native language
5. loss of ability to speak in clear sentences
6. decreasing ability to understand the spoken word
7. unable to use words correctly

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Improve Communication by:

- Connecting:
 - Make eye contact and speak face to face.
 - Say your name or the person's name when approaching or initiating contact.
 - Be aware of your body language and voice inflections.
 - Respond to where they are emotionally.
 - Avoid responding with annoyance or anger.

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Improve Communication by:

- Assisting with problems with language or expression:
 - Offer the word if the person cannot think of it.
 - Encourage person to let go of thought and come back to it later.
 - Simplify requests or questions to short, specific or one-step directions.
 - Respond to their emotion, even if you do not understand their words.

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Find a way to understand the person when their words are not enough

1. Know the person
 - understand their preferences, what comforts them and what upsets them
2. Do not rely only on the spoken word
 - read their feelings, behaviors, facial expressions, body language and tone of voice

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Three Keys to Quality Interactions

1. Affirm the person's feelings. Show empathy.
2. Solve the problem whenever possible.
3. Distract and/or relocate.

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In closing remember the following points:

1. Communication is the foundation for success when interacting with someone with dementia.
 - do not rely only on the spoken word
 - read the emotions beneath the words
2. Be mindful of the perspective of the person with dementia
 - the world is perceived through a veil of complex emotions
3. Use the keys to quality interactions.
 - affirm the person's feelings & show empathy
 - solve the problem whenever possible
 - distract and/or relocate

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Alzheimer's Association
 24/7 Helpline 800.272.3900
www.alz.org/MANH

- Care Consultation
- Education, publications and training
- Multicultural outreach
- MedicAlert® + Safe Return®
- Support groups
- Public policy/Advocacy
- Research

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Vision:
 Creating a world without
 Alzheimer's disease.

Mission:
 To eliminate Alzheimer's Disease through the advancement of research, to provide and enhance care and support for all affected, and to reduce the risk of dementia through promotion of brain health.

Some information provided by the National Institute on Aging/National Institutes of Health

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MA/NH Chapter
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