

# January is Alzheimer's Awareness Month

In Canada, January is Alzheimer's disease awareness month. During this month, Canadians are encouraged to learn more about dementia and its impact.

Alzheimer's disease causes a steady loss of memory and the ability to speak, think, and do your daily activities. The disease gets worse over time, but how quickly this happens varies. Some people lose the ability to do daily activities in the first few years. Others may do fairly well until much later in the disease.

Mild memory loss is common in people older than 60. It may not mean that you have Alzheimer's disease. But if your memory is getting worse, see your doctor. If it is Alzheimer's, treatment may help.



## Symptoms

For most people, the first symptom of Alzheimer's disease is memory loss. Other symptoms include having trouble making decisions, getting lost in places you know, and having trouble learning. The symptoms get worse slowly over time. Alzheimer's disease also causes changes in thinking, behaviour, and personality.

Often the person who has a memory problem doesn't notice it, but family and friends do. Having some short-term memory loss in your 60s and 70s is common, but this doesn't mean it's Alzheimer's disease. Normal memory problems aren't the same as the kind of memory problems that may be caused by Alzheimer's disease. For example, normally you might forget:

- Parts of an experience.
- Where your car is parked.
- A person's name. (But you may remember the name later.)

With Alzheimer's disease, you might forget:

- An entire experience.
- What your car looks like.

- Having ever known a certain person.

## Diagnosis

Your doctor will do tests to make sure your symptoms are caused by Alzheimer's disease and not another condition.

Your doctor will ask about your past health and do a physical exam. The doctor may ask you to do some simple things that test your memory and other mental skills. Your doctor may also check how well you can do daily tasks.

The exam usually includes blood tests to look for another cause of your problems.

You may have tests such as CT scans and MRI scans, which look at your brain. By themselves, these tests can't show for sure whether you have Alzheimer's.

It usually is helpful to bring a family member or someone you trust to the appointment. A family member may be able to provide the best information about how your day-to-day functioning, memory, and personality have changed.



## Treatment

There is no cure for Alzheimer's disease. But there are medicines that may slow down the symptoms for a while and make the disease easier to live with. If you're a caregiver, there are steps you can take to help the person be independent for as long as possible.

## Caring for those with Alzheimer's disease

Care needs will change over time. You'll work with health professionals to create a safe and comfortable environment and make tasks of daily living easier. You can help by making sure the person eats well. You can also help manage sleep problems. Your loved one may also need help with bladder and bowel control.

### Seek care now if:

- Symptoms such as a shortened attention span, memory problems, or seeing or hearing things that aren't really there (hallucinations) develop suddenly over hours to days.
- A person who has Alzheimer's disease has a sudden, significant change in normal behaviour or if symptoms suddenly get worse.

### Watchful waiting

If memory loss isn't quickly getting worse or interfering with work, social life, or the ability to function, it may be normal age-related memory loss. Talk to your doctor if you are concerned about memory loss.

## Wellness Articles

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