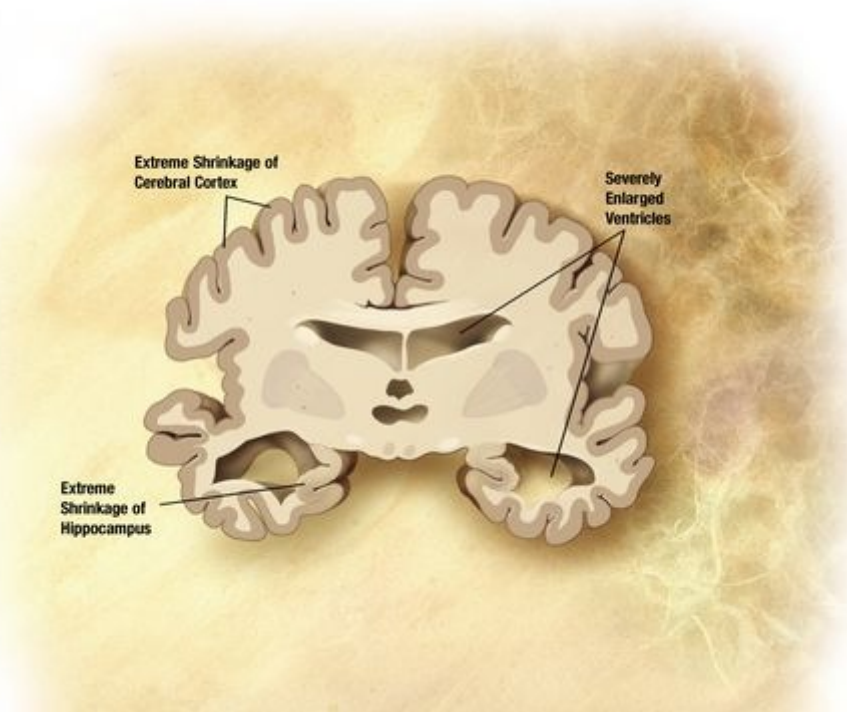


Alzheimer's Disease: The Mind Robber



severe Alzheimer's disease brain

Conner stared at his grandmother. "Grandma, I'm not Patrick. My name is Conner."

Conner's grandmother raised her eyebrows and said, "I know my own children. You're Patrick."

"Okay, Grandma, I'm Patrick," he said. Conner turned away. *Boy, was Grandma acting weird,* he thought. Lately she kept calling him Patrick--that was his dad's name, not his. Why did she do that? It was as if she didn't know him at all. Tears welled up in his eyes.

Yesterday he had told her several times that he wasn't Patrick. He had thought she was playing games with him. But she became angry and yelled at him after the fourth or fifth time that he insisted he was Conner. He cried yesterday too.

Confusion

Conner's grandmother wasn't playing games with Conner at all. She really did think he was his father, Patrick, when he was a boy. Grandma mixes things up in her mind. She can't help

it. She has *Alzheimer's* (AHLZ-hi-merz) disease, or AD. If you have an elderly grandparent or friend, you have probably heard of this disease. Some call it the disease of forgetfulness.

Everyone forgets something from time to time. That's pretty normal. You might forget to turn in your homework. Your father might not remember to buy milk and bread on his way home from work. And as people age, they may forget more things--like a birthday, or whether they took their medicine.

The Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center (ADEAR) says that with Alzheimer's, the forgetting is about things that are part of everyday life. You might not notice the symptoms of AD at first. The early symptoms are mild and usually develop slowly. Only later, when a person starts saying and doing things that seem very different from before, are the symptoms noticeable. A person can forget how to get dressed. He or she might not remember how to get home from the grocery store that is visited once a week. Like Conner's grandmother, a person may not recognize loved ones at all. This is why Alzheimer's has also been called a mind-robbing disease.

An Age-Related Disease

Alzheimer's disease is mostly a disease of old age.

As people age-into their seventies and eighties-their chances of having AD go up. Children never get it. And one person cannot catch it from someone else.

Alzheimer's does occur in people younger than 60 or 65, but this is rare. Tracy Mobley was diagnosed when she was 38 years old. "My husband began to notice that I was forgetting a lot of things, such as recent conversations or decisions that we had made." One day, Tracy didn't recognize her own dog. She watched the dog for 10 minutes, and then asked her son whose dog it was. "Mom, that's Daisy!" he replied. According to ADEAR, Alzheimer's in people younger than 60 may be inherited.

One of Several Diseases

There are several disorders that cause forgetfulness. Alzheimer's is one of them. The disorders cause brain cells to be destroyed. When brain cells are lost, *dementia* (dih-MEN-shuh) is the result. Bleeding or blood clots in the brain can also cause this damage. In AD, the

damage is caused by deposits in the brain that keep the cells from working properly. The symptoms of dementia, besides forgetfulness, are

- problems with reasoning, such as having trouble balancing a checkbook
- poor judgment, such as driving a car incorrectly
- becoming lost in the neighborhood or other familiar places
- having trouble finding the right word or making sense when speaking
- not being able to get dressed or bathe without help.

Treatment

There are several treatments for Alzheimer's. Research is ongoing to find more and better treatments too. So far, Alzheimer's cannot be stopped or cured. Drugs and other treatments can help slow down the development of Alzheimer's, or help people with it function better. Some of those medicines can help control some symptoms that AD causes, like not being able to sleep, wandering around the house or away from home, nervous excitement, anxiety, and depression.

Lately, research has looked into other treatments. They include anti-inflammatory drugs, vitamin E, and statins-cholesterol-lowering medicines.

Experts say that an important "treatment" for people with Alzheimer's disease is activities that keep the mind active. Reading, learning new things, and staying active with social groups can help.

Ad Affects You

Caring for a person who needs help with everyday living takes a lot of time and energy. If a grandparent or another person with Alzheimer's lives with you, your parents may not have much time to spend with you. This can cause a mix of unpleasant feelings.

These feelings are normal. You may experience any or all of the following: sadness, anger or frustration, fear, and even resentment.

Ways to Cope

You can cope by letting your parents know how you feel. If you are angry because Grandma acts differently, learn what you can about AD and how it is affecting her. If you resent her for the time your parents spend taking care of her, ask how you can help out. If she lives with you or near you, you can do little things together. And you can help your parents with some of the household work. Then they may have more time to spend with you.

Tracy Mobley's 9-year-old son keeps an eye out for his mother. If Tracy is very tired and her symptoms are worse, he lets his dad or his grandmother know so that they can help.

Alzheimer's is a devastating disease. Coping with an Alzheimer's patient will take understanding and patience on your part. Remember that.

Things You Can Do Together

There are still many things that you can do together with your grandparent or other person who has Alzheimer's. Here are a few of them--check off the ones that you would like to do.

- Listen to music
- Paint pictures
- String beads
- Rake leaves
- Brush or comb one another's hair
- Fold laundry
- Look at family photos
- Make a memory book
- Take a walk
- Toss a ball
- Put a puzzle together
- Blow bubbles

There are many more things that you can do together. Your loved one will enjoy doing the activity and love being with you, even if he or she can't always show it.