

Diagnosis and Treatment

How is Alzheimer's disease diagnosed?

No single test can detect Alzheimer's disease. Instead, the disease is diagnosed through a medical examination. The purpose of the medical examination is to determine the cause of the symptoms and to treat the illness.

During the medical exam:

- Questions are asked about the person's general health, past medical problems, and ability to carry out daily activities.
- Tests are given to measure memory, problem solving, attention, counting, and language.
- Blood, urine, or spinal fluid may be tested.
- Brain scans may be done.

Sometimes the results of these tests help the doctor find other possible causes for the person's symptoms. For example, thyroid problems, drug reactions, depression, brain tumors, and blood vessel disease in the brain can cause Alzheimer's-like symptoms. Some of these other conditions can be treated successfully.

Currently, the only definite way to diagnose Alzheimer's disease is to look at brain tissue; however, doctors must usually wait until they do an autopsy, which is an examination of the body done after a person dies. Because of this, doctors can only make a diagnosis of "possible" or "probable" Alzheimer's disease while the person is still alive. Although, at specialized centers doctors can diagnose Alzheimer's disease correctly up to 90 percent of the time.

For further information, please contact:
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One family's story...



Mom had been losing weight, she wasn't interested in going to church or cooking anymore, things she'd always enjoyed and looked forward to. She didn't bathe regularly and always wore the same clothes. We didn't know what was wrong and were afraid that it might be Alzheimer's disease. When we finally got her to the doctor, we learned that it was probably early Alzheimer's disease. She's on medication now and is back to going to church with Dad. My brother and I are going to a support group with Dad and we're learning how to take care of Mom. We aren't quite so afraid anymore.

Adapted from www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/AlzheimersInformation



Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Regional Milwaukee Office

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What medications treat the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease?

Several prescription drugs are currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat people who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. These medications are most helpful when started early in the disease. They seem to slow down the progression of the disease for some people for a short while and can sometimes reduce symptoms. This makes providing care easier for the caregiver, at least for a while. It is important to understand that none of these medications stops the disease itself.

Medications used to treat Alzheimer's disease include Aricept (donepezil), Exelon (rivastigmine), Razadyne (galantamine) and Namenda (memantine).

What can the caregiver do?

Alzheimer's disease can affect the way a person feels and acts in addition to its impact on memory and other thought processes.

It is important for the caregiver to:

- Recognize that the person is not just acting mean or ornery, but is showing symptoms of the disease.
- Enter the experience or the reality of the person with Alzheimer's, not try to change it.
- Change the person's environment to resolve challenges that he/she might have.
- Provide comfort, security and ease of mind.
- Maintain their own health and well-being.
- Find information and support to understand the disease.

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Where can I learn more?

It is important for people who have Alzheimer's disease and their families to be educated and informed about the disease. Many local resources are available with the most up-to-date information about Alzheimer's disease. A few to consider:

Alzheimer's Association
Southeastern Wisconsin Chapter
620 South 76th Street, Suite 160, Milwaukee
(414) 479-8800
24/7 Help Line: (800) 272-3900
Web: www.alz.org/sewi/

Interfaith Older Adult Programs, Inc.
600 W. Virginia Street, 3rd Floor,
Milwaukee
(414) 291-7500
Web: home.interfaithmilw.org

Milwaukee County Department on Aging,
Aging Resource Center of Milwaukee County,
Marcia Coggs Human Service Center
1220 West Vliet Street, Suite 300, Milwaukee
(414) 289-6874
Web: county.milwaukee.gov/aging



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