

Though there is no treatment to stop or reverse Alzheimer's, neurologists, on the occasion of World Alzheimer's Day that falls on September 21 every year, talk about how Ayurveda and Vitamin D helps to manage the disease. PIONEER HEALTH tells you more

ALZHEIMER'S: THE LOWDOWN

WHAT IS ALZHEIMER

Alzheimer's Disease (AD) is a fatal form of dementia which leads to progressive loss of memory and cognition. "It is a progressive mental deterioration that destroys memory and other important mental functions due to generalised degeneration of the brain. It generally occurs in middle or old age due to damage of brain tissues. It is a common type of dementia, a syndrome in which there is deterioration in memory, thinking, behaviour and the ability to perform everyday activities. It is one of the major causes of disability and dependency among older people worldwide. The impact of the disease begins slowly and gets worse over time affecting quality of life and life expectancy," Dr KM Hassan, associate director Neurology, Jaypee Hospital, Noida, says.

Also called senile dementia, it is a slowly progressive neuro-degenerative disease of the brain that often begins in people over 65 years of age.

CAUSES

Damage to the brain usually starts a decade or more before memory and other cognitive problems appear. Brain cells themselves degenerate and die, eventually destroying memory and other important mental functions. The

AD damages and kills brain cells. Patients suffering from AD are usually older, but the disease isn't a normal part of ageing. The AD can be caused due to genetic factors, depression, head injuries, hypertension, obesity amongst others.

STATPACK

Every three seconds someone in the world develops dementia. The AD accounts for 60 to 70 per cent of all cases of dementia. Worldwide, around 50 million people have dementia with a sizeable burden of disease in India with its ageing population. Nearly 10 million new cases come up every year worldwide. In India the annual incidence of AD among seniors aged more than 65 years is estimated to be approximately 10 per 1,000.

EARLY DIAGNOSIS

Initial symptoms are often mistaken for normal ageing. It requires a medical diagnosis by a Neurologist and a comprehensive clinical evaluation and neuro-imaging to diagnose

"You must consult an experienced neuro specialist if you have a family history of the disease. They'll take a complete medical history and conduct neurological exam, and review your symptoms. The diagnostic process may also include magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), PET scan of the brain or computed tomography (CT) scans of the brain. There are some blood tests which can be help you to detect," Dr Madhukar Bhardwaj, consultant, Neurology, Aakash Healthcare Super Speciality Hospital, says.

SYMPTOMS

People with AD mainly suffer from progressive pattern of cognitive and functional impairment. They usually present with decline in cognitive functions such as forgetfulness, difficulty thinking and understanding, mental confusion particularly in evening, delusion, making things up, difficulty concentrating, inability to learn new things, inability to do simple calculation, or inability to recognise common things.

"People with AD also suffer from behavioral changes in form of becoming aggressive, irritable, agitated, meaninglessly repeating own words; they may have personality changes in form of restlessness, lack of restraint, or wandering and getting lost; or they may suffer from mood changes in form of anger, apathy, general discontent, loneliness, or mood swings. They may have psychological problems such as depression, hallucination, or paranoia," Dr Hassan says.

STAGES OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

- **Stage 1—No cognitive decline:** People have normal mental functions with no memory loss.
- **Stage 2—Very mild cognitive decline:** People have normal forgetfulness associated with ageing.
- **Stage 3—Mild cognitive decline:** There is an increase in forgetfulness, problem in focusing and concentrating, difficulty in finding the right word, decreased work performance.
- **Stage 4—Moderate cognitive decline:** Decreased memory of

recent events and difficulties in completing complex tasks efficiently. Patient starts withdrawing from family or friends.

■ **Stage 5—Moderately severe cognitive decline:** People have major memory deficiencies and need help to complete their daily activities. Memory loss is more prominent as the patient may not remember their address or phone number and their whereabouts.

■ **Stage 6—Severe cognitive**

decline: Patients require extensive assistance to carry out daily activities as the ability to speak declines. There is a loss of bladder or bowel control & have little memory of recent events & remember only some details of their earlier life.

■ **Stage 7—Very severe cognitive decline (late dementia):** People have no ability to communicate. They require assistance with most activities. They also lose psychomotor skills like the ability to walk.