

*Module 3, Lesson 4 Handout:*

## **Alzheimer's Disease: Symptoms & Changes in Daily Life**

Dementia is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of diseases and conditions related to impaired memory and cognitive decline. Alzheimer's disease is the most prevalent of these diseases, making up 60% - 80% of dementia cases. Alzheimer's disease is most common in the elderly however early-onset Alzheimer's can occur between the ages of 40 and 60. About 5% of those with Alzheimer's are diagnosed at this earlier stage of life, affecting about 2 to 3 hundred thousand young people in America each year.

### **Research**

Alzheimer's has its own disease profile which is different from cognitive decline and general memory loss that occurs as we age. It's not reversible and there is no cure although there are lifestyle changes that can be made to slow the progression of the disease and improve quality of life.

Research is showing an increase in obesity, type 2 diabetes and Alzheimer's disease and an interrelationship among the 3 conditions leading researchers to coin Alzheimer's as Type 3 Diabetes.

Studies suggest that the neurodegeneration that occurs with Alzheimer's disease is associated with abnormalities in the expression of IGF-1 and IGF-2 (insulin like growth factor 1 and insulin like growth factor 2). In advanced Alzheimer's disease, there was found to be less insulin, IGF peptides and receptors in the brain. This means that those who have these reduced biomarkers with the absence of type 2 diabetes or obesity may be more at risk. The similarities between abnormalities in the brain during diabetes and Alzheimer's disease leads researchers to believe that it is a brain-specific form of diabetes.

### **Symptoms and Disease Management**

The first sign of Alzheimer's disease is the inability to remember new information over time. Although it is usually categorized as mild, moderate or severe, there are in fact 7 clinical stages of Alzheimer's disease:

- **Stage 1:** Normal
  - Mentally healthy, free of mood changes or cognitive decline
- **Stage 2:** Normal aged forgetfulness
  - Inability to recall some information, first signs of cognitive decline

- **Stage 3:** Mild cognitive impairment
  - Decrease in performance of daily routine tasks, difficulty concentrating
- **Stage 4:** Mild Alzheimer's disease
  - Inability to recall major recent events, challenges in writing, decreased ability to prepare meals and perform daily, more complex activities
- **Stage 5:** Moderate Alzheimer's disease
  - Inability to dress oneself properly or repeating the same outfits, no longer able to live independently, inability to recall major events in their life
- **Stage 6:** Moderately severe Alzheimer's disease
  - Inability to dress or bathe oneself without supervision, incontinence, decline in speech ability, emotional changes sometimes accompanied by threatening or violent behavior
- **Stage 7:** Severe Alzheimer's disease
  - Very limited speech, loss of ambulatory skills, loss of motor functions in the face including inability to smile, joint deformities

It's important to note that not all clients who are diagnosed with this disease or have a family history of the disease will exhibit all of the symptoms. These occur differently from individual to individual, and while onset typically happens rather quickly, it is different for everyone as well.

## 10 Most Common Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease

- Challenges with decision making, planning or problem solving
- Challenges completing routine and familiar tasks
- Disorientation
- Difficulty making sense of visual images and spatial relationships
- Unusual difficulties with speaking, reading or writing
- Misplacing things, decreased memory and lack of ability to retrace steps
- Decreased or poor judgement
- Withdrawal from work or social activities
- Drastic personality and mood changes

When working with clients diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, have patience and recognize the changes that are occurring for this person from mood changes to disorientation. It's helpful to identify who their primary caregiver is and get them involved to help your client be more successful in making small changes. This can be someone who does their grocery shopping so they can make changes towards a healthier diet or someone to be with them during sessions to help remember and keep them accountable for the changes they plan to make.

If you're working with a client who has a family history of Alzheimer's, educating them on the early signs and symptoms as well as preventive measures can be most helpful. Work with them to make lifestyle changes that will help them Eat Empowered to prevent memory loss and prevent or slow progression of Alzheimer's in the future.