



## A Brief Note on Alzheimer's Disease

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### Introduction

Alzheimer's disease is an irreversible, progressive brain disorder that slowly destroys memory and thinking skills and, eventually, the ability to carry out the simplest tasks. In most people with the disease—those with the late-onset type—symptoms first appear in their mid-60s. Early-onset Alzheimer's occurs between a person's 30s and mid-60s and is very rare. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia among older adults.

The disease is named after Dr. Alois Alzheimer. In 1906, Dr. Alzheimer noticed changes in the brain tissue of a woman who had died of an unusual mental illness. Her symptoms included memory loss, language problems, and unpredictable behavior. After she died, he examined her brain and found many abnormal clumps (now called amyloid plaques) and tangled bundles of fibers (now called neurofibrillary, or tau, tangles). These plaques and tangles in the brain are still considered some of the main features of Alzheimer's disease. Another feature is the loss of connections between nerve cells (neurons) in the brain. Neurons transmit messages between different parts of the brain, and from the brain to muscles and organs in the body.

Many other complex brain changes are thought to play a role in Alzheimer's, too. This damage initially appears to take place in the hippocampus, the part of the brain essential in forming memories. As neurons die, additional parts of the brain are affected. By the final stage of Alzheimer's, damage is widespread, and brain tissue has shrunk significantly. Alzheimer's disease is a neurological condition in which the death of brain cells causes memory loss and cognitive decline. It is the most common type of dementia, accounting for around 60–80% of cases of dementia in the United States. Alzheimer's disease is a condition that affects the brain. The symptoms are mild at first and become more severe over time. It is named after Dr. Alois Alzheimer, who first described the condition in 1906. Common symptoms of Alzheimer's disease include memory loss, language

problems, and impulsive or unpredictable behavior. One of the main features of the condition is the presence of plaques and tangles in the brain. Another feature is a loss of connection between the nerve cells, or neurons, in the brain. These features mean that information cannot pass easily between different areas of the brain or between the brain and the muscles or organs. Alzheimer's disease is a progressive condition, meaning that the symptoms get worse over time. Memory loss is a key feature, and this tends to be one of the first symptoms to develop. The symptoms appear gradually, over months or years. If they develop over hours or days, a person may require medical attention, as this could indicate a stroke.

**Memory loss:** A person may have difficulty taking in new information and remembering information. This can lead to:

- repeating questions or conversations
- losing objects
- forgetting about events or appointments
- wandering or getting lost

**Cognitive deficits:** A person may experience difficulty with reasoning, complex tasks, and judgment. This can lead to:

- a reduced understanding of safety and risks
- difficulty with money or paying bills
- difficulty making decisions
- difficulty completing tasks that have several stages, such as getting dressed

**Problems with recognition:** A person may become less able to recognize faces or objects or less able to use basic tools. These issues are not due to problems with eyesight.

**Problems with spatial awareness:** A person may have difficulty with their balance, trip over, or spill things more often, or they may have difficulty orienting clothing to their body when getting dressed.

**Problems with speaking, reading, or writing:** A person may develop difficulties with thinking of common words, or they may make more speech, spelling, or writing errors.

Alzheimer's is a progressive disease, where dementia symptoms gradually worsen over a number of years. In its early stages, memory loss is mild, but with late-stage Alzheimer's, individuals lose the ability to carry on a conversation and respond to their environment. Alzheimer's is the sixth-leading cause of death in the United States. On average, a person with Alzheimer's lives 4 to 8 years after diagnosis but can live as long as 20 years, depending on other factors.

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