



# Memory Screenings

A Publication of the *Alzheimer's Foundation of America*

## Why are Memory Screenings Important?

- Memory screenings are a significant first step toward finding out if a person may have a memory problem. Memory problems could be caused by Alzheimer's disease or other medical conditions.
- While a memory screening is not used to diagnose any particular illness and does not replace consultation with a qualified physician or other healthcare professional, it is very helpful. A screening can check a person's memory and other thinking skills. It can indicate if someone might benefit from a more complete medical visit.
- It is very important to identify the disease or problem that is causing memory loss. That is why a person should follow up with a qualified healthcare professional for a comprehensive exam.
- Some memory problems can be readily treated, such as those caused by vitamin deficiencies or thyroid problems. Other memory problems might result from causes that are not currently reversible, such as Alzheimer's disease. In general, the earlier the diagnosis, the easier it is to treat one of these conditions.
- Early recognition of mild cognitive impairment (MCI)—mild memory loss that may eventually lead to dementia—provides an opportunity for healthcare professionals to

treat this condition, and possibly slow down the changes in memory and other thinking skills.

- Early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease can improve quality of life. Individuals with Alzheimer's disease can learn more about the disease, including available and emerging medical treatments; get counseling and other social services support in their community; address legal, financial and other planning issues; and have more of a say in decision-making. Caregivers and other family members can take advantage of community services, such as support groups.



*"Memory screenings can point you in the right direction. Take the results and start talking with your healthcare professional—sooner rather than later."*

**Hector Elizondo, Actor  
and Honorary Celebrity  
Chairman, AFA**

## Facts about Memory Screenings

- Various types of healthcare professionals provide memory screenings, including physicians, psychiatrists, physician assistants, psychologists, nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers, pharmacists and dementia care administrators.
- Memory screenings can take place in a variety of settings, such as a physician's office, pharmacy or senior center.
- A memory screening is a simple and safe evaluation tool that checks memory and other thinking skills. It can indicate whether an additional checkup by a qualified healthcare professional is needed.
- A screening consists of a series of questions and/or tasks

designed to test memory, language skills, thinking ability and other intellectual functions.

- A memory screening is not used to diagnose any particular illness and does not replace consultation with a qualified physician or other healthcare professional.
- The person who gives you the screening will review the results with you. Individuals with a below-normal score or those with a normal score but who still have concerns should follow up with a qualified healthcare professional.
- Results of the memory screenings are confidential. Ask for a copy to bring to your healthcare professional.

# Twelve Warning Signs of Dementia

1

Trouble with new memories

2

Relying on memory helpers

3

Trouble finding words

4

Struggling to complete familiar actions

5

Confusion about time, place or people

6

Misplacing familiar objects

7

Onset of new depression or irritability

8

Making bad decisions

9

Personality changes

10

Loss of interest in important responsibilities

11

Seeing or hearing things

12

Expressing false beliefs



## Who Should Be Screened?

Memory screenings make sense for anyone concerned about memory loss or experiencing warning signs of dementia; whose family and friends have noticed changes in them; or who believe they are at risk due to a family history of Alzheimer's disease or a related illness. Screenings also are appropriate for anyone who does not have a concern right now, but who wants to see how their memory is now and for future comparisons.

- Am I becoming more forgetful?
- Do I have trouble concentrating?
- Do I have difficulty performing familiar tasks?
- Do I have trouble recalling words or names in conversation?
- Do I sometimes forget where I am or where I am going?
- Am I misplacing things more often?
- Have family or friends told me that I am repeating questions or saying the same thing over and over again?
- Have I become lost when walking or driving?
- Have my family or friends noticed changes in my mood, behavior, personality or desire to do things?

**81%**

**Source:**

*AFA's ICAN3 Survey: Life of a Sandwich Generation Caregiver*

*of survey respondents reported that the individuals they care for experienced symptoms of Alzheimer's disease for one year or more before being diagnosed.*

*48 percent of caregivers thought these symptoms were a natural part of getting older.*

## Facts about Dementia

Dementia is a general term that describes a group of symptoms related to the loss of multiple intellectual functions--such as loss of memory, judgment, language and complex motor skills--that interferes with daily living.

Dozens of diseases or conditions can cause dementia. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia in persons aged 65 and older. Other common types include vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia and alcohol related dementia.

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive, degenerative disorder of the brain caused by the death or permanent dysfunction of brain cells (neurons). The disease robs individuals of memory and, eventually, overall mental and physical function.

The causes of Alzheimer's disease are unknown, and there are no specific treatments that prevent the death of brain cells or cure the disease. But several medications are available that may help slow the progression of symptoms of the disease.

- It is estimated that as many as 5.1 million Americans may have Alzheimer's disease.
- Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of aging, but age is the greatest risk factor. The number of people with the disease doubles for every five-year age interval beyond 65.
- In a small percentage of cases, Alzheimer's disease affects people at a much younger age—30's, 40's and 50's.
- Alzheimer's disease is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States.

# Ask Your Healthcare Professional

Good communication can maximize your visit to a physician or other healthcare professional as a follow up to a memory screening or due to other memory concerns. Being open and asking questions help toward proper diagnosis and treatment. Bring your current medications, notes on symptoms and other issues — and a list of questions. Ask:

- What is my diagnosis?
- What other tests should I take?
- Should I see a neurologist, geriatrician or other specialist?
- How does the disease progress (symptoms, time span)?
- What are all the available treatments?
- What is the effectiveness of each medication, in terms of memory, behavior and other symptoms?
- What are the side effects, dosage, possible drug interactions and pros and cons of each treatment?
- Are there various methods to administer these drugs?
- What changes in condition should I report to you?
- Besides medication, what do you recommend in terms of diet, exercise and other lifestyle changes?
- What brain exercises can I do?
- Are there clinical drug trials that would be appropriate for me? What are the risks and benefits?
- Do you have information about community resources, such as support groups, educational workshops and services for my family?
- Will you be speaking with my other healthcare professionals?
- How often should I see you?

## Planning Issues to Address

Early diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia is critical. It allows individuals and their families to learn more and plan better for the future, and it can improve quality of life. Consider:

- Discussing the disease, its symptoms, the way it progresses and the range of treatment options with qualified healthcare professionals.
- Telling family and friends about the diagnosis, educating them about the disease and asking for family support.
- Identifying and participating in community resources, such as support groups, adult day services and respite programs at local Alzheimer's organizations or other community agencies.
- Participating in clinical trials.
- Seeking support services for primary caregivers and other family members, including support groups, telephone buddies and respite care.
- Preparing advance directives, such as a living will and power of attorney.
- Planning for the future with regard to treatment choices, legal issues, financial matters, long-term care and end-of-life wishes while the individual is still able to make decisions.
- Reviewing insurance coverage, including health, disability, life, prescription drug and long-term care.
- Addressing issues such as safety, wandering, motor vehicle driving and living arrangements.
- Checking out long-term care options, including in-home care, assisted living facilities and nursing homes.
- Protecting the individual with the disease from physical, emotional or financial abuse.

# 90%

The only definite way to diagnose Alzheimer's disease is an autopsy at death. However, clinicians can diagnose Alzheimer's disease correctly up to 90 percent of the time. Obtaining a proper diagnosis involves consulting with a healthcare professional knowledgeable about dementia, communicating symptoms and undergoing extensive testing. Tools to diagnose "probable" Alzheimer's disease can include a complete medical history; blood, urine or other medical tests; neuropsychological tests that measure memory, problem solving, attention and language; and brain scans.

## Your Rights

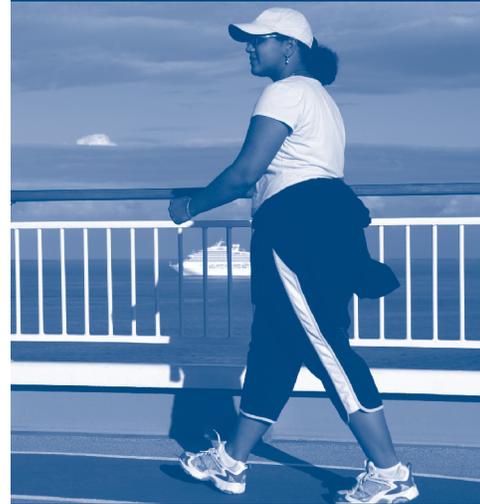
- Consumers have the right to demand proper evaluation of memory disorders by a healthcare professional.
- Persons with dementia are entitled to care from professionals who understand basic treatment strategies for cognitive wellness.

# Key to Successful Aging

The key to successful aging is a healthy, common sense lifestyle. The goals are to slow or prevent the loss of brain cells, maintain the brain's capacity to make up for any loss and let remaining brain cells function well. Here are some tips:

- Visit your doctor or other healthcare professional regularly.
- Follow a healthy diet and take vitamins, as discussed with your clinician.
- Exercise daily, such as walking 30 minutes per day.
- Control hypertension, diabetes and heart disease—risk factors for dementia—through physical exercise, quitting smoking, controlling blood pressure, lowering cholesterol and avoiding obesity.
- Participate in activities that stimulate your brain, such as reading, crossword puzzles and learning new skills.
- Be social.
- Manage stress through techniques such as relaxation, meditation and yoga.
- Treat depression.
- Limit alcohol consumption

The Power of Being Proactive  
**Go for It!**



Visit  
[www.alzprevention.org](http://www.alzprevention.org)  
a Web site of the  
Alzheimer's Foundation of America

## Concerned about Memory Problems?

 ALZHEIMER'S FOUNDATION  
OF AMERICA  
*National Memory  
Screening Day*<sup>®</sup> 2010

**NOVEMBER 16, 2010**

 ALZHEIMER'S FOUNDATION  
OF AMERICA  
*Community  
Memory Screenings*

**YEAR-ROUND**

Sites across the nation will be offering free, confidential memory screenings and educational materials on AFA's National Memory Screening Day, an annual event held each November.

Some organizations also offer community screenings at other times of the year.

To learn more, visit  
[www.nationalmemoryscreening.org](http://www.nationalmemoryscreening.org) or call **866.AFA.8484**



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