



Associated Neurologists of Southern Connecticut

Health & Wellness Newsletter

Volume 2, Number 1 February 2011

What's Inside?

- ◆ Normal Aging vs. Alzheimer's Disease
- ◆ Challenges of Care-giving
- ◆ Benefits of Clinical Trial Participation
- ◆ Resources

Visit us on the Web!

[www.ANSCHealth
andWellness.com](http://www.ANSCHealthandWellness.com)

Treatment of Alzheimer's Disease

By Kenneth C. Siegel, M.D.

Founder



Treatment of Alzheimer's disease can be divided into two broad areas: medical therapy and environmental modification.

The principal medications used for cognitive enhancement are acetylcholinesterase inhibitor medications, which increase the amount of acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter in the brain involved with memory and thought. These medicines include Aricept, Razadyne and Exelon, and may enhance memory, interests, and performance of daily activities. None of these medications have been demonstrated to be clearly superior to the other; however individual responses may vary from patient to patient. The most common side effects in this group of medications include nausea, vomiting, and dizziness.

The second class of medications are NMDA inhibitors, which decrease the effects of another transmitter in the brain called glutamate. Side effects of these medications are fairly uncommon but may include agitation, increased confusion, and difficulty sleeping. There are potential interactions with other medicines and with other medical problems and should be monitored by the treating physician.

Use of these two classes of medicines in combination has demonstrated some ability to allow patients to maintain a level of function similar to that at initiation of therapy two years after initiation. While occasional dramatic responses are seen with these medicines, a more realistic expectation is a slowing of the cognitive decline associated with Alzheimer's disease.

[\(continued on page 2\)](#)

Helping You Live as Fully as Possible



Alzheimer's Disease Treatment

(continued from page one)

Behavioral abnormalities frequently occur with Alzheimer's disease and various medications are employed to treat these. Tranquilizers and sleeping pills, certain anti-hypertensive medicines, particularly beta-blockers and calcium channel blockers, anticholinergic and various other types of medications may produce a worsening of Alzheimer's symptoms and should be used very cautiously.

Environmental modifications may be necessary for patients, for example in regards to ability to drive a car. The use of appliances around the home may pose significant challenges to patients and their caregivers. Frequent corrections of patients' cognitive errors are a source of frustration to the patient and caregivers and should be avoided. Tasks requiring multiple choices should be reduced, e.g., arranging a few sets of clothing in a closet rather than a whole wardrobe that is rarely used, use of night lights and avoidance of excessive stimulation all are factors for maintenance of a safe environment for our patients.

At Associated Neurologists we are pleased to be at the forefront of Clinical Research, offering studies to our patients to modify or slow the progression of patients based on the possible causes of Alzheimer's disease, which include cellular damage and loss of connection between one cell and another because of accumulation of abnormal proteins such as amyloid or tau. Genetic factors are also being evaluated in our studies. Exercise appears to be an important factor in improvement in the overall performance of patients. Roles of cognitive exercises and diet remain to be fully evaluated.

Is it Normal Aging or Alzheimer's?

By [Amy B. Palmer, Psy.D](#)

Supervisor, Neuropsychology Department



This is a common question many people ask. It's true – as we age, we become more forgetful and find ourselves searching for words more frequently. This phenomenon makes it confusing for seniors to know if what they are experiencing is normal for the aging process. Fortunately, our neuropsychologists are able to answer this question.

A neuropsychological evaluation consists of a series of verbal and paper and pencil tests that assess different cognitive functions. Memory, language, judgment, and attention are just a few areas that are evaluated. A person's test results are compared with other people of their same age (and sometimes education level) who have no neurologic or psychiatric illnesses. Because we have a large database of what is "normal" for the aging process, we can provide valuable information to seniors and their doctors about their current functioning.

There are several possible outcomes of a neuropsychological evaluation. Sometimes it is determined that the person has normal cognitive functioning. Other times, testing reveals a reversible cause for the cognitive decline, such as anxiety or depression. However, sometimes the testing is consistent with a dementia, such as Alzheimer's. Although it is hard to learn of such a diagnosis, it is essential that it is caught early, so medications and behavioral modifications can be implemented as soon as possible.

If you or a loved one have concerns about memory or other cognitive skills, please talk to your doctor about whether a neuropsychological evaluation can help. Knowledge is power. Only with a correct diagnosis can you and your doctor develop a treatment plan that can help you.

What can I do?

By [Christine McCarthy, Ph.D](#)

Neuropsychologist



As neuropsychologists, we are frequently asked the best ways to improve memory and prevent dementia. Unfortunately, there are no treatments or activities that have been proven to prevent or cure dementia. Numerous scientific studies have, however, identified some generally beneficial health and lifestyle practices followed by people who maintain good cognitive health. These practices may reduce your risk of developing dementia, delay the age of onset of dementia, and slow the progression of cognitive impairments once they have developed.

Stay healthy by following your physicians' recommendations.

- ◆ *Maintaining a healthy weight and diet* may reduce your risk of developing memory and thinking problems. Increasing evidence suggests that following the so-called "Mediterranean diet," with more fish, poultry, and fresh fruit and vegetables, and less red meat and high fat dairy foods, may help prevent onset of dementia, and prolong life in those with dementia. There is little support for or against the use of specific vitamins or nutritional supplements.
- ◆ *Maintaining good cardiovascular health* promotes good brain health, reduces your risk of developing vascular dementia -- the second most frequent form of dementia, and lessens the severity of memory problems experienced during the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. Vascular risk factors such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and tobacco use also most likely increase your risk for developing dementia from all causes, including Alzheimer's disease.

Remain physically, socially, and cognitively active.

- ◆ *Engage in regular physical activity.* Regular vigorous exercise seems to improve brain health. Physically active people typically demonstrate less cognitive decline and impairment than sedentary people. It's never too late to start. Your memory is likely to improve after several months of regular vigorous exercise. Exercise can also slow the rate of cognitive decline in people with mild cognitive impairment and minimize the medical symptoms of people with Alzheimer's disease.



- ◆ *Keep learning and engaged with others.* Learning new subjects or skills, reading, pursuing hobbies, playing cognitively challenging games, and spending time with others may reduce your risk of developing dementia. You should choose activities that you enjoy and not just those that "should be" good for you. Playing games with others—even online—will be more beneficial than playing alone. People with Alzheimer's disease should be encouraged to continue hobbies that they have enjoyed in the past.

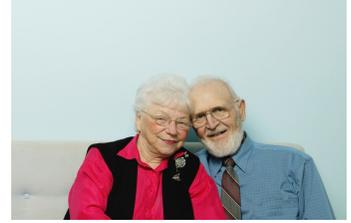
Maintain good emotional health.

- ◆ *Depression and anxiety* can reduce the health of your brain and can cause reversible memory problems. They also prevent you from engaging in health promoting practices and activities. Consult with your physician if depression or anxieties prevent you from enjoying life and functioning effectively.

Primary source: Promising Strategies for the Prevention of Dementia, Middleton, L.E., and Yaffee, K., *Archives of Neurology*, 2009; 66(10): 1210-1215.

The Stress of Caregiving

By [Deb Del Vecchio-Scully, LPC, NCC, NBCCH](#)
Health and Wellness Coordinator



Caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's can be overwhelming with new challenges each day. According to the National Institute of Aging, caregivers are at increased risk for developing their own health problems, including depression and anxiety. The risk of developing these problems increases if they do not receive support from family, friends and the community. Fortunately, there are many effective coping strategies and resources to ease the burden.

One of the biggest challenges is adjusting to the changing behaviors and abilities of your loved one. It can be helpful to develop strategies including maintaining routines and rituals, such as eating at a favorite restaurant or visiting children and loved ones. These strategies can prevent social withdrawal and help to create normalcy for both you and your loved one. There are many ways to manage stress and find support and you'll find through experimentation, what works best for you and your loved one.

Many find joining a support group is an excellent way for sharing concerns, learning information and feeling connected to others who are coping with similar issues. Consider respite care to give yourself a break from the day-to-day intensity and demands of caregiving. Such services allow you a breather while knowing your loved one is being well taken care of. Taking advantage of programs available at your local senior center can also keep your loved one more physically and socially active while being well supervised during the day.

Maintaining normal routines and activities such as exercise and healthy eating are important for your well-being and your loved one. Listening to a Meditation and Relaxation CD or music can be very calming and soothing. At ANSC, we provide a patient education library as well as referrals to community resources. In addition, we have listed below some websites that are particularly helpful. If you need additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Alzheimer's Disease Resources

<http://www.alz.org/ct/> (Alzheimer's Association)

<http://www.swcaa.org/pages/home.php> (Southwestern CT Agency on Aging)

<http://www.ct.gov/agingservices/site/default.asp> (Department of Social Services, Aging Services Division)

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/> (National Institute on Aging)

The 36-Hour Day: A Family Guide to Caring for People with Alzheimer Disease, Other Dementias, and Memory Loss in Later Life, 4th Edition -- Nancy L. Mace, Peter V. Rabins

Meditation and Relaxation http://healthjourneys.com/Product_Detail.aspx?id=482

A Caregiver's Guide to Changes Associated with Alzheimer's Disease

By [Deb Del Vecchio-Scully, LPC, NCC, NBCCH](#)



People living with Alzheimer's disease experience many changes affecting their behavior, memory and ability to communicate. These changes can be frustrating for both the individual and loved ones. However, taking a supportive attitude can ease these frustrations for everyone.

People with Alzheimer's disease may experience behavioral and personality changes, such as becoming more irritable, anxious or impulsive. Maybe you've noticed increased confusion, sensitivity to noise, wandering behaviors, or agitation. Perhaps you've tried "quizzing" the person with Alzheimer's disease, only to notice that it doesn't help or increases frustration. Another particularly challenging change is the lack of insight Alzheimer's sufferers may have, possessing little awareness of their impairments. Fortunately, there are many simple modifications in approaching someone with Alzheimer's disease that can often ease the challenges.

- Make eye-contact and use the person's name.
- Use a soothing voice and gentle touch.
- Ask only one question at a time and limit choices to 2-3 options.
- Use a distraction or humor to reduce frustration.
- Try to maintain a consistent daily routine.
- Keep a bulletin board displayed where you can leave clear messages.
- Play music the person enjoyed throughout their life.

In later stages of the disease, serious changes occur which can affect the safety of you or the person with Alzheimer's disease, such as paranoia, hallucinations or aggressive behaviors. If such a change occurs, please contact his or her physician immediately.

Don't forget to cope with your own frustration by taking a few breaths and reminding yourself it is the illness not the person. The Alzheimer's Association is always available by phone for caregivers who need some additional emotional support.

Caregiver Resources

National Institute on Aging Caregiver Guide

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/Alzheimers/Publications/caregiverguide.htm>

National Institute on Aging Caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/NR/rdonlyres/EoF45395-A473-4B26-8F7E-86F4314405CE/o/CaringGuide.pdf>

National Institute on Aging Caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease

<http://www.familycaregiving101.org/> (Family Caregiver 101)

<http://www.caps4caregivers.org/> (Children of Aging Parents)

<http://www.nfcacares.org/> (National Family Caregivers Association)

Benefits of Clinical Trial Participation

By [Peter McAllister, MD](#)

Director, Clinical Research

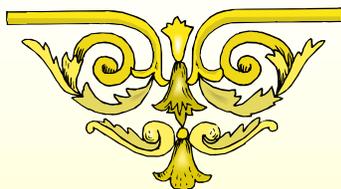


Alzheimer's disease is a devastating neurological disorder affecting over 4.5 million people in the United States. Predominantly striking those 65 and older, the disease causes a relentlessly progressing decline in memory and cognitive function. Although there are four medications available that have been shown to slow the progression of memory decline, there is currently no treatment available to reverse the ravages of Alzheimer's disease, and there is no cure. Clinical research studies are needed to find new therapies to combat this devastating disease.

At ANSC, we have conducted clinical research for more than 15 years, searching for better treatment and cures for many neurological conditions. Our ongoing studies for patients with Alzheimer's disease provide our patients with alternative treatments that are otherwise unavailable. We are very excited about these cutting edge projects, and would encourage everyone who has a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, or has a family member with the condition, to consider participating in a study.

The advantages of participating in a clinical research study are many, including getting access to new treatments not available to the general public, the satisfaction of being part of a "landmark" study, and greater access to our neurology staff. There is no cost for participation in a research study, and there may be compensation for time and travel. Patients and family members are fully informed about the study prior to entry, including logistics, benefits, risks, and side effects. Participation is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any time.

If you would like more information on being part of an Alzheimer's disease clinical research study, speak to your neurologist, physician assistant or ask to speak with our research staff.



Executive Editor:

Deb Del Vecchio-Scully, LPC

Editor In Chief:

Amy B. Palmer, Psy.D

Contributors:

*Kenneth Siegel, MD,
Peter McAllister, MD,
Christine McCarthy, Ph. D*

Associated Neurologists of Southern Connecticut

75 Kings Highway Cutoff
Fairfield, CT 06824
Tel: 203.333.1133
Fax: 203.333.3937

670 Boston Post Road
Milford, CT 06460
Tel: 203.877.1414
Fax: 203.877.3144



www.anscneuro.com