



First Baptist Church Parish Nursing Notes FALL 2004

I know what I am doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, when you pray to me, I'll listen.
Jeremiah 29: 11-12

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Alzheimer's Disease -----Some Things We Need To Know

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, an estimated 4.5 million Americans will have Alzheimer's disease. By 2050, unless a cure is found, that number will likely exceed 13.2 million. A recent Gallup poll states that Alzheimer's has affected 1 in 10 U.S. families, while 1 in 3 respondents say they know someone who's been diagnosed. On average, it costs \$174,000 to care for an Alzheimer's victim over his or her lifetime.

Until a few weeks ago, all this was just good information to know and share with others. Now it has become personal. My former spouse has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. This will affect the lives of our children for some time to come. As a result of this situation, I want to share some things that could help as we seek to understand and deal with this disease.

What is Alzheimer's disease? It is a medical illness that affects how the brain functions. It is a form of dementia, which causes significant memory loss that interferes with daily living. For reasons we do not fully understand, Alzheimer's disease destroys brain cells that are primarily responsible for memory and causes problems with other mental functions, such as learning, language, using proper judgment, organizing and planning. Some people experience changes in mood and behavior. It is progressive, meaning that symptoms become worse over time. On average, the course of the disease from diagnosis usually spans from 7-10 years.

What is the difference between normal aging and warning signs of early stage Alzheimer's disease?

Normal Aging

Periodic forgetfulness

Forgetting where you left
Your car keys.

Forgetting a friend's birthday.
Occasionally misplacing items

Something More

Increasing problems with short-term memory
That interferes with daily functioning.
Forgetting what your car keys are used for.

Difficulty recognizing friends and family.
Putting things in strange places (for example,
Placing an iron in the freezer.

10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's disease:

1. Forgetting things more often, such as job skills.
2. Putting things in strange places.
3. Having problems with complicated tasks, such as balancing a checkbook.
4. Confusion about the day, year, season.
5. Having a sudden change in mood or behavior.
6. Difficulty finding the right words when speaking.
7. Significant mood or behavior disturbances, such as fear, suspicion, confusion.
8. Lack of interest in doing things.
9. Forgetting common words or using the wrong words.
10. Problems doing familiar things, such as getting dressed or forgetting how to use simple things, such as a pen or toothbrush.

Early diagnosis is important!

If treatment is initiated early, it can slow the progression of symptoms and enable a person to continue to function longer. This is very valuable for people who will provide care for the person with Alzheimer's disease. Family caregivers will have more time to seek necessary support and resources that can help them provide care for their loved ones while still taking care of themselves. There will be many important decisions about care, finances and legal matters that will need to be made...power of attorney for healthcare, durable power of attorney, wills, etc.

RESOURCES:

Local Alzheimer's Association----- www.northalaalz.org phone----256-880-1575
Alzheimer's Assoc.----- www.alz.org -----1-800-272-3900
National Family Caregivers Assoc. --www.nfcacares.org -----1-800-896-3650
Children of Aging Parents---- www.caps4caregivers.org -----1-800-227-7294
National Institute on Aging----- www.nia.nih.gov
U.S Administration on Aging----- www.aoa.ahhs.gov -----1-202-619-7501
Eldercare Locator----- www.eldercare.gov -----1-800-677-1116

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