

# Alzheimer's Awareness



## Alzheimer's Today

**Is a progressive and fatal brain disease.** More than 5 million Americans now have Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's gets worse over time, and it is fatal. Today it is the seventh-leading cause of death in the United States.

**Is the most common form of dementia,** a general term for the loss of memory and other intellectual abilities serious enough to interfere with daily life.

**Has no current cure.** But treatments for symptoms, combined with the right services and support, can make life better for the millions of Americans living with Alzheimer's. We've learned most of what we know about Alzheimer's in the last 15 years. There is an accelerating worldwide effort under way to find better ways to treat the disease, delay its onset, or prevent it from developing.

## Alzheimer's and the brain

The brain has 100 billion nerve cells (neurons). Each nerve cell communicates with many others to form networks. Nerve cell networks have special jobs. Some are involved in thinking, learning and remembering. Others help us see, hear and smell. Still others tell our muscles when to move.

To do their work, brain cells operate like tiny factories. They take in supplies, generate energy, construct equipment and get rid of waste. Cells also process and store information. Keeping everything running requires coordination as well as large amounts of fuel and oxygen.

In Alzheimer's disease, parts of the cell's factory stop running well. Scientists are not sure exactly where the trouble starts. But just like a real factory, backups and breakdowns in one system cause problems in other areas. As damage spreads, cells lose their ability to do their jobs well. Eventually, they die.

## Risk Factors

**Age** The greatest known risk factor for Alzheimer's is increasing age. Most individuals with the disease are 65 or older. The likelihood of developing Alzheimer's doubles about every five years after age 65. After age 85, the risk reaches nearly 50 percent.

**Family history** Research has shown that those who have a parent, brother or sister, or child with Alzheimer's are more likely to develop Alzheimer's. The risk increases if more than one family member has the illness. When diseases tend to run in families, either heredity (genetics) or environmental factors or both may play a role.

## Risk factors you may be able to influence

Age, family history and heredity are all risk factors we can't change. Now, research is beginning to reveal clues about other risk factors we may be able to influence.

**Head injury:** There appears to be a strong link between serious head injury and future risk of Alzheimer's. Protect your head by buckling your seat belt, wearing your helmet when participating in sports, and "fall-proofing" your home.

**Heart-head connection:** Some of the strongest evidence links brain health to heart health. Your brain is nourished by one of your body's richest networks of blood vessels. Every heartbeat pumps about 20 to 25 percent of your blood to your head, where brain cells use at least 20 percent of the food and oxygen your blood carries.

The risk of developing Alzheimer's or vascular dementia appears to be increased by many conditions that damage the heart or blood vessels. These include high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and high cholesterol. Work with your doctor to monitor your heart health and treat any problems that arise.

**General healthy aging:** Other lines of evidence suggest that strategies for overall healthy aging may help keep the brain healthy and may even offer some protection against developing Alzheimer's or related diseases. Try to keep your weight within recommended guidelines, avoid tobacco and excess alcohol, stay socially connected, and exercise both your body and mind.



Source: **Alzheimer's Association**

Provided Courtesy of [www.WellnessProposals.com](http://www.WellnessProposals.com)