

*Alzheimer Society*

Alzheimer's disease

# First steps



## First steps

You have likely been worried and anxious about the changes you are seeing in yourself. Now that you have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, you may be concerned about the future. However, you have already taken an important first step in caring for yourself: getting a diagnosis.

## Changes to expect

The changes you are experiencing are because of Alzheimer's disease. You may have trouble finding words, completing thoughts, following directions or remembering information. Later you may feel confused and have difficulty with familiar tasks. These changes are related to the disease as it affects memory, thinking and behaviour. Other people may notice changes in your behaviour or personality. The effects of the disease will change how you live day to day.

The information in this brochure can help you cope with the changes you are experiencing, and plan for future changes so you can continue living your life to its fullest every day.

## Step 1 Recognize that you are going through a variety of emotions

You may respond to the news of the diagnosis and the changes caused by the disease with a variety of emotions. You might feel angry, embarrassed, frustrated, afraid or sad. These emotions are normal and may come and go.

Let those close to you know how you are feeling.

Members of your family may also be experiencing the same types of emotions.

Sometimes, people with Alzheimer's disease feel sad or depressed. If your feelings are overwhelming and won't go away, talk to your doctor.

## Step 2 Tell people

Let the people closest to you know that you are living with Alzheimer's disease. Explain what the disease is and how it is affecting you. Sharing this information will help them understand that the difficulties you are having are a result of the disease. Sharing the information will also allow you to tell them how they might be able to support you.

Refer friends and family to your local Alzheimer Society for useful information and resources.

### Step 3 Learn about Alzheimer's disease

Find out what you can about the disease and how it will progress. Learn about tips and strategies that might help you day to day. The Alzheimer Society has many useful resources to help people with the disease, such as our "Shared Experiences" booklet, our website ([www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca)) and support groups.

### Step 4 Explore treatment options

While there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, medications can help some people with some of the symptoms. Read about the treatments that are available. Discuss their risks and benefits with your doctor. You may wish to participate in a research study. Your local Alzheimer Society will have information on treatment options and research studies in your area.

### Step 5 Recognize that you have a disease that affects your abilities

- Focus on what you can do, not what you can't do.
- Find ways that help you cope with the changes, for example, writing down important things in a memory book, labelling cupboards or marking a calendar.
- Simplify your life wherever you can.
- Reduce the number of pressures you face.
- Follow a routine.



People who have the disease say you should:

- Learn to be patient.
- Try not to be hard on yourself.

## Step 6 Seek help

Call your local Alzheimer Society to find out what help is available in your area. Community agencies may offer services like helping with your shopping, preparing meals or providing other practical assistance.

## Step 7 Look for support

Find people you are comfortable with to share your feelings and emotions. It may be a member of your family, a good friend, another person with Alzheimer's disease or an Alzheimer Society support group.

No matter who it is, the important thing is to share your experiences and how you are feeling. Some people also find it helpful to write their thoughts, feelings and experiences in a journal.

## Step 8 Plan for the future

Start planning now for the future:

- If you are working, it is important to prepare for your future retirement.
- If you own a business, you will need to make plans for when you can no longer do things on your own.
- If you have been putting off decisions about your personal life, make them now.
- Make sure your paper work is in order, including legal and estate planning.
- Ensure that you have chosen someone to make financial and health-care decisions for you when you are unable to do so. Talk to the person about your wishes and write them down.

This will ensure that your requests are followed when you are unable to communicate them yourself.

## Step 9 Take care of yourself

Maintain your physical health, stay active, make healthy food choices and spend time with your family and friends. Enjoy life to the fullest. Focus on what you can still do. Do the things you enjoy and that bring you meaning and fulfillment. Some days may be better than others, but strive to create those times each day that are satisfying and worthwhile.

## Step 10 Know the Alzheimer Society is here to help

The Society can help by:

- Giving you the information you need to learn more about the disease and coping strategies
- Providing support by telephone or through group support
- Registering you with the MedicAlert® Safely Home® program to ensure that if you get lost, there is help at hand to get you home.
- Locating services in your community.



The **Alzheimer Society** is the leading nationwide health charity for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Active in communities across Canada, the Society :

- Offers information, support and education programs for people with dementia, their families and caregivers
- Funds research to find a cure and improve the care of people with dementia
- Promotes public education and awareness of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias to ensure people know where to turn for help
- Influences policy and decision-making to address the needs of people with dementia and their caregivers.

For more information, contact your local Alzheimer Society or visit our website at [www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca).

**Help for Today. Hope for Tomorrow...<sup>®</sup>**

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Alzheimer Society of Canada  
20 Eglinton Avenue West, 16th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M4R 1K8  
Tel: 416-488-8772 1-800-616-8816 Fax: 416-322-6656  
Email: [info@alzheimer.ca](mailto:info@alzheimer.ca) Website: [www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca)  
Facebook: [facebook.com/AlzheimerCanada](https://facebook.com/AlzheimerCanada)  
Twitter: [twitter.com/AlzCanada](https://twitter.com/AlzCanada)

Charitable registration number: 11878 4925 RR0001