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Living with Alzheimer’s disease can be challenging. It is important to take steps to be as healthy as possible. Research shows that there are many things that can make health and quality of life better when living with Alzheimer’s disease. Lifestyle choices such as healthy eating, stress management, and physical and mental activity, can improve quality of life, may help to slow the progression of the disease and make it easier to manage the changes that the disease brings.

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The disease was first identified by Dr. Alois Alzheimer in 1906. He described the two hallmarks of the disease: “Plaques” are deposits of a protein called “beta amyloid,” or A-beta. When A-beta molecules accumulate and stick together, it is toxic to brain cells. “Tangles” are fiber clumps of a protein called Tau. They eventually “choke” off the living cells. And when brain cells are damaged and die, the brain shrinks in some regions. Memory decline, personality changes, problems carrying out daily activities and other symptoms of Alzheimer's disease are caused by the destruction and death of nerve cells. As Alzheimer's disease progresses and affects different areas of the brain, various abilities and behaviours become impaired. Once an ability is lost, it is not known to return.

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Sporadic Alzheimer's disease
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Families with this rare form of Alzheimer's disease have very strong family histories of Alzheimer's disease (many family members over many generations). Familial Alzheimer's disease runs in families and accounts for less than 5% of all cases.

Familial Alzheimer's disease is due to changes in specific genes that can be directly passed on from parent to child. If a person has familial Alzheimer's disease, their children have a 50% chance of inheriting the disease-causing gene and developing Alzheimer's disease. Familial Alzheimer's disease has the same symptoms as sporadic Alzheimer's disease and can develop at any age.

The effects of Alzheimer's disease
Alzheimer's disease is a fatal disease that eventually affects all aspects of a person's life: how they think, feel, and act. Each person is affected differently. It is difficult to predict which symptoms will happen, the order in which they will appear, or the speed of their progression. The following are some of the changes that may happen as the disease progresses.

Cognitive and functional abilities
A person's ability to understand, think, remember and communicate will be affected over time. The ability to make decisions will be reduced. Simple tasks that have been performed for years will become more difficult or be forgotten. Confusion and memory loss, initially for recent events and eventually for long-term events, will occur. The ability to find the right words and follow a conversation will be affected. Sometimes people lose their way, even when walking in familiar surroundings. The first cognitive changes often happen a few years before the disease is actually diagnosed.

Emotions and moods
A person may appear to lose interest in favourite hobbies. While some people may become less expressive and withdrawn, it is still possible to reach people with Alzheimer's disease even in the very late stages. It is important to remember that a person may still feel joy, anger, fear, love and sadness.

Behaviour
Changes will develop in the way the person reacts to what is happening around them. These reactions may seem out of character. At times, some common reactions include repeating the same action or words, hiding possessions, physical outbursts and restlessness. Such behaviours can be distressing or challenging for the person and their family members or caregivers.

Physical abilities
The person will eventually experience a gradual physical decline affecting their coordination and mobility. This will change their ability to independently perform day-to-day tasks such as eating, bathing and getting dressed.

Is there treatment?
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