THE END OF ALZHEIMER’S STARTS WITH ME™
Dementia: Can we reduce the risk?

World Alzheimer’s Day, September 21st of each year, is a day on which Alzheimer’s organizations around the world concentrate their efforts on raising awareness about Alzheimer’s and dementia. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia, a group of disorders that impairs mental functioning. Every 68 seconds, someone develops Alzheimer’s disease.

Alzheimer’s disease is often called a family disease, because the chronic stress of watching a loved one slowly decline affects everyone. 5.4 million Americans are living with Alzheimer’s. Alzheimer’s disease is the sixth-leading cause of death in the United States and the only cause of death among the top 10 in the United States that cannot be prevented, cured or even slowed. With the increases in life spans and baby boomers coming of age, support for Alzheimer’s research is more critical to our families than ever.

What Is Alzheimer’s disease?
Alzheimer’s disease is an irreversible, progressive brain disease that slowly destroys memory and thinking skills, and eventually even the ability to carry out the simplest tasks. In most people with Alzheimer’s, symptoms first appear after age 60. Estimates vary, but experts suggest that as many as 5.1 million Americans may have Alzheimer’s disease. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common cause of dementia among older people. Dementia is the loss of cognitive functioning—thinking, remembering, and reasoning—and behavioral abilities, to such an extent that it interferes with a person’s daily life and activities. Dementia ranges in severity from the mildest stage, when it is just beginning to affect a person’s functioning, to the most severe stage, when the person must depend completely on others for basic activities of daily living.

Causes
The cause for most Alzheimer’s cases is still mostly unknown except for 1% to 5% of cases where genetic differences have been identified. Several competing hypotheses exist trying to explain the cause of the disease.

Signs and Symptoms
The most common early symptom of Alzheimer’s is difficulty remembering newly learned information. Just like the rest of our bodies, our brains change as we age. Most of us eventually notice some slowed thinking and occasional problems with remembering certain things. However, serious memory loss, confusion and other major changes in the way our minds work may be a sign that brain cells are failing.
### Signs Of Normal Change vs. Early Alzheimer’s Symptoms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal</th>
<th>Early Alzheimer’s Disease</th>
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<tr>
<td>Can’t find your keys</td>
<td>Routinely place important items in odd places, such as keys in the fridge, wallet in the dishwasher</td>
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<td>Search for casual names and words</td>
<td>Forget names of family members and common objects, or substitute words with inappropriate ones</td>
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<td>Briefly forget conversation details</td>
<td>Frequently forget entire conversations</td>
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<td>Feel the cold more</td>
<td>Dress regardless of the weather, wear several skirts on a warm day, or shorts in a snow storm</td>
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<td>Can’t find a recipe</td>
<td>Can’t follow recipe directions</td>
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<td>Forget to record a check</td>
<td>Can no longer manage checkbook, balance figures, solve problems, or think abstractly</td>
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<td>Cancel a date with friends</td>
<td>Withdraw from usual interests and activities, sit in front of the TV for hours, sleep far more than usual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make an occasional wrong turn</td>
<td>Get lost in familiar places, don’t remember how you got there or how to get home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feel occasionally sad</td>
<td>Experience rapid mood swings, from tears to rage, for no discernible reason</td>
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### Diagnosis

**To diagnose Alzheimer’s doctors may:**

- Ask questions about overall health, past medical problems, ability to carry out daily activities, and changes in behavior and personality
- Conduct tests of memory, problem solving, attention, counting, and language
- Carry out standard medical tests, such as blood and urine tests, to identify other possible causes of the problem
- Perform brain scans, such as computed tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), to distinguish Alzheimer’s from other possible causes for symptoms, like stroke or tumor
- These tests may be repeated to give doctors information about how the person’s memory is changing over time.
Are You at Risk?

Risk for Alzheimer’s
The number of people with the disease doubles every 5 years beyond age 65.

Down Syndrome and Alzheimer’s
People with Down Syndrome can experience premature aging. Because of this, they’re at a higher risk for age-related health conditions like Alzheimer’s.

Alzheimer’s Genetic Risk
Genes aren’t destiny. But much of a person’s risk for Alzheimer’s disease is inherited.

Obesity and Alzheimer’s
Today’s obesity epidemic may be tomorrow’s Alzheimer’s epidemic. The high insulin levels seen in obese people may mean a high risk of Alzheimer’s disease. People with diabetes are at a particularly high risk.

Genetic risk: Apo E gene
A risk factor gene already identified makes one form of a protein called apolipoprotein E (ApoE). Having this gene doesn’t mean you will definitely develop AD; it only increases the risk.

Prevention

Dementia Prevention: Brain Exercise
Leisure activities such as reading, playing board games, playing musical instruments, and dancing are associated with a reduced risk of dementia.

Preventing Alzheimer’s
Our overall health habits can help reduce the risk of age-related illnesses.

References
http://www.alzinfo.org/08/alzheimers/world-alzheimers-day
http://www.helpguide.org/elder/alzheimers_disease_symptoms_stages.htm