

HEALTH NEWS

How To Talk To Your Parent About Alzheimer's Disease

(NAPSA)—No one wants to believe a parent might be suffering from Alzheimer's disease (AD). Fear of what a diagnosis may mean for you and your loved one can make approaching the topic with them incredibly challenging.

While some with AD may initiate their own diagnosis and care, for most it will be a loved one who approaches the individual about changes in memory or independent functioning and alerts their physician. As families gather for the holiday season and you spend more time with your parents, you may begin to notice subtle changes in their daily functioning or behavior that are not normal signs of aging. It's essential you speak with your parent about seeking medical attention as soon as you begin to notice any changes with memory, thinking and judgment skills, or mood and behavior, as these changes should be evaluated by a physician.

Warning Signs of AD*

The warning signs of AD are more than memory loss. Know what to look for and what to tell a doctor. Be familiar with the symptoms and watch for changes over time in one or more of the following:

- Memory loss
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks
- Problems with language
- Disorientation to time and place
- Poor or decreased judgment
- Problems with abstract thinking
- Misplacing things
- Changes in mood or behavior
- Changes in personality
- Loss of initiative

While recent advancements in AD research provide new hope for those affected and give physicians and caregivers greater resources to help treat and manage the condition, early diagnosis is key to



For adult children, it can be difficult to discuss the topic of AD.

helping your loved one function independently as long as possible.

"Early diagnosis lessens anxieties about unknown problems, allows time to make choices that maximize quality of life, provides a better chance of benefiting from treatment, and allows more time to plan for the future," said Jeffrey Applebaum, M.D., University of California, Davis Medical Group. "While it may be difficult to come to terms with the situation, getting through the awkwardness of confronting a parent about their mental health is crucial to successful treatment."

How to Talk to Your Parent About AD

Here are tips to help you speak with your parent and encourage them to meet with a physician for an initial evaluation:

- Let your parent know you love them and are there to support them.
- Inform yourself by researching AD signs and symptoms prior to approaching your parent to gain a better understanding of AD and what to expect.
- Begin the conversation by speaking in general health terms or about memory rather than putting your parent on the defensive about the term Alzheimer's disease.

- Keep a record of things you've noticed about their memory or behavior so you have specific examples to discuss with them and the physician.

- Assist them in scheduling an appointment with their family practitioner or in seeking a referral for a neurologist or other specialist.**

- Offer to accompany your parent during the tests or offer transportation to the doctor.**

Carol Dearing, whose parents, Charlotte and Robert Findley, suffer from AD said, "We recognized symptoms in my mother early. It was difficult to approach her, but seeking medical attention early has allowed her to function better than she would have if we had not taken action."

Carol worked with Dr. Applebaum, her parents' physician, to find the best treatment options. Charlotte and Robert were taking an acetylcholinesterase inhibitor and when Namenda® (memantine HCl) became available in the U.S., Dr. Applebaum prescribed the two medications in combination. After taking Namenda, her father's cognitive decline seemed to slow and her mother regained the ability to perform some activities of daily living such as communicating her feelings and personal grooming. Carol considers Namenda a ray of hope and says that the medication has allowed her family to have back some of the mother they once knew.***

Namenda is indicated for moderate to severe AD and is available by prescription in the U.S. Ask your physician about Namenda, go to www.Namenda.com, or call 1-877-2-NAMENDA (1-877-262-6363) or the Alzheimer's Association at 1-800-272-3900.

Namenda is contraindicated in patients with known hypersensitivity to memantine HCl or to any excipients used in the formulation. The most common adverse events reported with Namenda vs. placebo (>5% and greater than placebo) were dizziness, confusion, headache, and constipation. In patients with severe renal impairment, the use of Namenda has not been systematically evaluated and is not recommended.

*Alzheimer's Association. Ten Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease. Accessed August 30, 2004, at <http://www.alz.org/AboutAD/Warning.asp>

**Some steps adapted from the Alzheimer's Association, Steps to Getting a Diagnosis at www.alz.org/Resources/FactSheets/Brochure_StepstoDiagnosis.pdf

***Individual patient response may vary.