

Memory Screenings Are An Essential Tool For Diagnosing Alzheimer's Disease

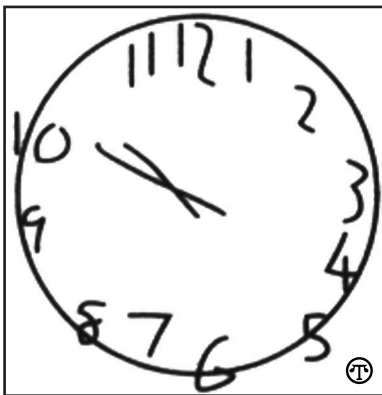
(NAPSA)—So you think your loved one might have Alzheimer's disease. Did you know that simple and safe memory-screening tests are available to help your doctor assess your loved one's memory and other mental functions?

"Memory screening tests are great tools that give doctors a benchmark for evaluating a person's memory," explained Jay Ellis, D.O., director of neuroscience research of the Berkshires, Pittsfield, Mass. "It's so important for people with Alzheimer's disease to get a proper diagnosis from their doctor so they can begin treatment, which can help slow the progression of symptoms."

The Ins and Outs of Memory Screenings

Memory screenings typically consist of a series of questions and tasks designed to test memory, language skills and thinking ability. Two common examples are the clock-drawing test and three-word recall test.

The clock-drawing test requires patients to draw a clock and set the hands at a specific time. Although there are a number of scoring systems for this test, the Alzheimer's disease cooperative scoring system is based on a score of five points: one point for the clock circle, one point for the numbers being in the correct order, one point for the numbers being in the proper spatial order, one point for the two hands of the clock and one point for the correct time. A



The spatial inaccuracies in this clock drawing could indicate the need for further evaluation for Alzheimer's disease.

normal score is four or five points. However, a score of three points or below could signal possible Alzheimer's disease.

Another test, the three-word recall, is a simple examination where patients are given the names of three unrelated objects to remember—table, ball and pen, for example. The patient is then asked to repeat the three words, scoring one point for each object correctly recalled. This test is administered alone or in combination with the clock-drawing test. Later in the doctor's visit, patients are asked to recall the original three words given in the beginning of the memory screening.

The Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE)—an 11-question measure that evaluates five areas

of cognitive function: orientation, memory, attention/calculation, language and visuospatial ability—is another, more-complex test used to screen for Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's Disease and the Benefits of Combination Therapy

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive, degenerative disorder that attacks the brain's nerve cells, resulting in loss of memory, thinking and language skills, as well as behavioral changes. An estimated one in eight persons over age 65 and nearly half of those 85 or older have Alzheimer's disease.

Although there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, FDA-approved treatments have been shown to slow the progression of symptoms and improve quality of life. A 2004 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that combining two classes of treatments, an NMDA receptor antagonist and a cholinesterase inhibitor, provided greater cognitive, functional and behavioral benefits to people with moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease than treatment with cholinesterase inhibitors alone. This approach to treatment is known as combination therapy.

For more information about Alzheimer's disease, including signs and symptoms, diagnostic tests and information about caregiving, visit www.alzheimersonline.com.