

## What Happens After Receiving A Diagnosis Of Alzheimer's Disease By Dr. Shurak, PsyD

Receiving a diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease can be a very overwhelming experience. It is important that certain issues be addressed after this diagnosis has been made. This article will review some of the common recommendations that doctors such as myself make for those with Alzheimer's Disease.

- 1) The most important step after receiving this diagnosis is begin treatment for this disorder. There are 4 different medications to choose from. Three of these medications (Aricept, Exelon, and Razadyne) are very similar and therefore typically only one of them is prescribed. The fourth medication is called Namenda and can be taken in conjunction with any of the first three. In the early stages of this disorder, it often is not necessary for a patient to be on both medications, although there can be exceptions. It is important to know that these medications cannot dramatically improve a person's memory, but rather are geared towards slowing down the rate of memory loss.
- 2) Memory problems can increase the risk of people making mistakes with taking their medications or managing their finances. For this reason, such individuals should receive assistance with these areas.
- 3) Another area that can be affected by Alzheimer's Disease is driving skills. In some cases, a recommendation is made for a person to undergo a driving evaluation. This can be arranged through the Department Of Motor Vehicles or a person called an occupational therapist.
- 4) Because Alzheimer's Disease is a progressive disorder, it is important to consult with a financial planner so that funds are set aside for long-term care. One should also contact an elder law attorney to obtain a document called a durable power of attorney. This document allows a person to designate who they would want to handle their affairs (medical, financial, etc.) if they should become incapacitated.

- 5) I encourage all my Alzheimer patients to be as mentally and physically active as possible since these factors may help slow down the rate of memory loss. My patients often ask me to tell them what specific activities do I recommend. I inform them that it is more important that they chose an activity that they enjoy so that they do it often.
- 6) Diet may also play an important role in slowing down the rate of memory loss. I recommend eating a diet rich in nutrients called antioxidants such as Vitamins A, C, and E. These nutrients may help protect the brain from unstable molecules (free radicals) that are often associated with conditions such as Alzheimer's Disease. Foods that have B complex vitamins such as folic acid also seem to protect the brain from damage. Antioxidants and folic acid are found in many fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- 7) If someone has been diagnosed with advanced Alzheimer's Dementia, recommendations become directed towards caregivers. This usually refers to spouses, siblings, children and friends since the majority of these patients are cared for at home. Caregivers are provided with information about Alzheimer's Disease including what to expect from their loved one and how to best cope with the challenges that come with being a caregiver. Support groups and caregivers courses are available in most communities as are local chapters of the Alzheimer's Association. In some cases, homecare is not a viable option and arrangements need to be made for relocation to an assisted living facility or a nursing home.

A wise man once said that knowledge is power. This common saying applies to those with Alzheimer's Disease as well since the more you know the more prepared you are to cope.