

ALZHEIMERS DEMENTIA

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Dementia is a disorder with loss of memory and other mental abilities (like thinking, judgement, calculation, behavior ,language, planning etc)severe enough to interfere with daily life. Symptoms usually develop slowly and get worse over time.

Alzheimer's Dementia(AD) is the most common form of dementia. Studies have shown that the frequency of AD varied from 0.34 to 1.5% above 60 years of age among the Indian population.The number of Alzheimer's patients in India is currently 14 lakh and in Uttar Pradesh is 2 lakh.With Alzheimer's cases on the rise,World Alzheimer's Day,21st September, is an appropriate occasion, to create awareness about this illness in public,as it is soon going to be an epidemic throughout the world.

Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging. Alzheimer's is a progressive disease, where dementia symptoms gradually worsen over a number of years. Those with Alzheimer's live an average of eight years after their symptoms become noticeable to others, but survival can range from four to 20 years

The traditional risk factors of dementia are advancing age, female sex, familial or genetic factors, illiteracy, addiction, hypertension, diabetes, poor socioeconomic status, trauma, nutritional factors, and stroke, whereas, marriage was found to be protective. The effect of curcumin, a yellow curry paste (turmeric) which is almost consumed universally by Indians has also been found to be protective.

THE EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF AD ARE :

1. Short term memory loss /forgetting recent things
2. Misplacing things and forgetting familiar ways or paths
3. Difficulty in planning and solving problems
4. Problem in completing familiar tasks
5. Trouble with speaking and writing
6. Poor judgement
7. Difficulty reading, judging distance and determining color or contrast
8. Withdrawal from work and social activities
9. Changes in mood and personality

Apart from the early warning signs, which gradually worsen with time, behavioral and psychological symptoms(BPSD) like sleep disturbance, wandering, restlessness, irritability, repetitive behavior, mood changes etc develop over time. Patients may gradually have difficulty in performing day to day activities.

The caregivers have to bear the brunt of the dementia patients. In India, the majority of the caregivers are women in 70% of cases, The principal sources of caregiver strain are BPSD and incontinence.

The awareness about dementia is poor among common people and also general practitioners. Dementia subjects are often stigmatized. Poor awareness leads to poor recognition, resulting in delayed treatment and complications. Media have started to raise awareness among the general public in India

Although current Alzheimer's treatments cannot stop Alzheimer's from progressing, they can temporarily slow the worsening of dementia symptoms and improve quality of life for those with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. Both pharmacological and non-pharmacological methods of treatment have been widely employed with success.

However, there are steps which help reduce the risk of development of Alzheimer's dementia:

Healthy lifestyle: Regular moderate exercise, healthy diet ,avoiding cigarettes and alcohol

Early detection and adequate control of Hypertension, Diabetes, obesity and depression

Social engagement

In India, Department of Geriatric Mental Health,KGMU,Lucknow, ARDSI (Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India),Dignity Foundation, Helpage India have been actively working and providing services to ,not only dementia patients, but also their caregivers.

Today, there is a worldwide effort under way to find better ways to treat the disease, delay its onset, and prevent it from developing and there is hope for such patients in the future.

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NATIONAL DEMENTIA HELPLINE: 0484-277-5088 (Mon-Sat 10 AM-4 PM)