

CAREGIVING TOPICS

Basics of Dementia

Third Session: Progressive Memory Disorders (3rd edition, 3/27/07)

Prepared by: Leilani Doty, PhD, Administrator University of Florida Memory Disorder Clinic
McKnight Brain Institute, Dept. of Neurology, Box 100236, Gainesville, FL 32610-0236
Clinic appointments (352)265-8408; Phone (352)273-5550; Fax (352)273-5575

Welcome to the third session of Basics of Dementia. I am Dr. Leilani Doty, Administrator of the University of Florida Memory Disorder Clinic, that is part of a network of the 15 Memory Disorder Clinics or Centers in the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, Alzheimer's Disease Initiative network. The purpose of the series of three sessions called Basics of Dementia is to describe briefly memory and memory disorders and to provide helpful suggestions for the involved family and other caregivers.

Basics of Dementia has three different sessions which are listed in the next Slide.

Basics of Dementia

1. Treatable Memory Disorders
2. Vascular Memory Disorders
3. Progressive Memory Disorders

This slide entitled Basics of Dementia shows the three sessions in this series: Session 1, Treatable Memory Disorders; Session 2, Vascular Memory Disorders (Vascular Dementias); and Session 3, Progressive Memory Disorders.

Let's turn to the next Slide.

Basics of Dementia, Session 3 Progressive Memory Disorders

This third session in the series talks about memory disorders that are progressive. Though there are many such disorders such as Lewy body disease, frontal dementia, frontotemporal dementia, Pick's disease, and progressive supranuclear palsy, this session focuses on the most often diagnosed progressive condition, Alzheimer's disease, sometimes called Dementia of the Alzheimer's Type.

Let's look at the next Slide.

Purpose of Session 3

1. Dementia
2. Three Stages of Alzheimer's disease
3. Signs of Alzheimer's disease
4. Helps for the family
5. Resources

First, I want to emphasize the definition of dementia. Let's look at the next Slide. This slide explains the general term Dementia.

Dementia (de...mentia)
de = decrease or decline
mentia = thinking

Decline (while alert and awake) in memory and thinking ability, which interferes with doing daily tasks.

Dementia is the general term that refers to the decline of mental abilities while a person is alert and awake. In other words, the person is clear-headed. The person is not a bit fuzzy in thinking as a result of trauma such as a fall, illness such as the flu, mental or physical exhaustion, dehydration, over medication or inappropriate medication or alcohol toxicity. The person is not drowsy; the person is awake. Yet there is a decline in thinking, memory abilities and language skills to the point of interfering in the ability to complete regular daily tasks at work or at home.

Now let's look at the next Slide and talk about Alzheimer's disease.

- Alzheimer's disease
1. Impacts about 5 million people in USA
 2. Impacts more females than males

Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease is the most commonly occurring progressive dementia. It affects about 5 million Americans and about 435,000 people in Florida. People over 85 years of age are at the highest risk. Research shows that almost half of them have Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. More women than men come down with the disease and we are still unsure about why this is so.

Let's see the next Slide.

- Alzheimer's disease:
1. Not normal aging
 2. Not contagious
 3. Not caused by aluminum pots & pans

Alzheimer's disease is not normal to aging, is not contagious, and is not caused by aluminum pots or pans. The onset of the disease varies, is unpredictable and slow. The disease results in others, usually women (usually wives and adult daughters), providing long-term care to the person with the condition.

The disease may be described in three stages. Let's look at the next Slide.

- Stages of Alzheimer's disease:
1. Forgetfulness
 2. Confusion
 3. Severe Dementia

In the first stage, Forgetfulness; the person usually functions pretty well with reminders. With reminders the person may be nearly self-sufficient in activities on the job, around the home and with personal care. In the second stage, Confusion; the person may need occasional assistance; thus, someone else should be readily available to help when needed. In the third stage, Severe Dementia, the person needs constant assistance and supervision and should be in a protective setting at home or in a facility. Let's review these three stages.

The next Slide sums up the first stage.

- 1st: Forgetful Stage
Person needs reminders.

The first stage is the Forgetfulness Stage. At this point people need reminders such as a note, a calendar, a timer that buzzes, a reminder phone call or a friendly reminding word from a family member, neighbor or friend.

The next Slide sums up the second stage.

- 2nd: Confusion Stage
Person needs occasional assistance.

I call the second stage the Confusion Stage. At this point the person needs someone available to provide occasional assistance with a task such as finding the right socks or shoes to wear, collecting and putting out the trash for pick-up, or putting the leash on the dog and going for a walk.

The next slide sums up the third stage.

3rd: Severe Dementia
Person needs constant help
and a safe place.

The third stage shows evidence of Severe Dementia. At this time, the person needs help almost continuously. In addition, the place of residence needs to be safe with good lighting, smooth floors to avoid falls, and grab rails to ease walking and general movement, especially in the bathroom and down the hallway.

Let's look at the next slide.

Early signs of Alzheimer's disease:

1. Decreased short-term memory
2. Forgets people's names
3. Forgets names of things
4. Less skill with routine tasks
5. Hard to decide

Alzheimer's disease is associated with damage to different parts of the brain. Early on in the disease, there are usually problems with short-term memory and language, especially recalling the names of people or objects. The symptoms of Alzheimer's disease usually include progressive memory loss and a decline in the ability to perform routine tasks at home or at work. There may be difficulty coordinating the hands to do mechanical tasks or skilled movements such as using a food chopper or coffee machine, and later, difficulty cutting up food on a dinner plate and eating appropriately. There may be confusion about the time (date or year) and location (not knowing the name of their street, the name of the building they enter or the name of their state).

Let's see the next slide.

Communication changes:

1. Harder to recall names of people
2. Harder to use exact words when talking
3. Harder to understand long sentences
4. Harder to keep up with details
5. Harder to stay on the topic

Communication skills change as the disease progresses. At first the person with the dementia may struggle to remember the specific name of a person or an item under discussion. It may become harder to understand long sentences or complicated conversations that were once easy to follow. The person may seem to ramble off on different topics that are not related to the main topic of a conversation. Questions about details or what was just said may be asked repeatedly.

As the decline continues, other difficulties may arise such as struggles with decisions, not finishing tasks, and changes in personal care or habits.

Let's note this next slide.

Changes in personal habits:

1. Skips baths
2. Changes clothes too often or tries to wear same clothes every day
3. Refuses to use soap or deodorant
4. Avoids friends or social events

As time continues to pass by, the person who once bathed regularly, changed clothes often and liked to lunch with friends now may want to wear the same outfit every day. They may wear too many clothes, mismatching clothes, or not enough clothing. This person may now refuse to bathe or shower and say that they just bathed a few moments ago (even if it was more than a day ago). There may be a tendency to avoid social events or family gatherings. Sometimes family members complain that often after a great deal of preparation or travel to attend an event, their loved one wants to leave a few minutes after arriving. In other words, they just arrive, say "hello" to almost everyone and then begin to ask, "When can I go home?" or "It's time to go home now."

Over the years, the continued decline may result in the person with dementia not recognizing family members, not remembering that dinner just ended and thus “feeling” hungry, being unable to feed or bathe themselves, and not being able to talk.

Although there is no cure for Alzheimer’s disease, family education can provide major help with adjustments regarding legal, financial, and health decisions.

The next slide lists helps for the family.

- Helps for the family:
1. Information
 2. Support groups
 3. Senior centers
 4. Day care
 5. Respite at home
 6. Community organizations
 7. Medicines

Early education and planning will help the person and the family prepare for unexpected or sudden changes. It is particularly important to identify a trustworthy family caregiver or resource person who may help with decisions regarding health, finances, or legal matters. Planning ahead for Durable Power of Attorney and Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care help to avoid confusion about decisions during times of crisis, especially health crises.

Family caregivers dealing with persons having any kind of memory disorder may benefit a great deal from support groups. Most members of support groups are experienced caregivers who can provide excellent assistance and common sense suggestions. Often these suggestions cost little or nothing because they consist of creative easy solutions that use simple words or simple actions to prevent or fix a problem in care management. Adult day care and day health care centers provide stimulating activities for the person and a break for the family caregiver. In-home respite or companion services can free up time for the family caregiver to do errands, reduce stress, or rest.

The next slide provides links to programs with information about helpers and services for the family caregiver.

Let’s look at the next slide which points out resources and toll free phone numbers to keep handy.

National Resources

AlzOnline (866)260-2466

Alzheimer’s Association (800)272-3900

ElderLocator (800)677-1116

* * * * *

Florida Resources: Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA)

Florida Elder Helpline (800)963-5337

Florida DOEA (850)414-2000

Are there any medicines that may help?

Let’s turn to the next slide.

Physician may suggest:

1. Diet changes and exercise
2. Memory boosters and protectors (prescription medicines)
3. Hormone replacement therapy
4. Anti-oxidants or neuro-protective vitamins, such as vitamins E and C
5. Homocysteine lowering B vitamins

A diet rich in grains, fresh fruits and vegetables provides anti-oxidants and health protectors. Resveratrol in red grapes (and other foods) and flavonoids in blueberries (and other foods) impact health. Daily exercise should include physical, emotional, spiritual and brain exercise.

There are several medicines that may shore up the normal memory chemicals made in the brain and strengthen the function of brain cells important for memory and thinking skills. Some of these medicines appear to slow the evidence of decline by helping the person to function better. Some of the medicines a physician may prescribe include “memory boosters”, other medicines, and vitamins such as homocysteine lowering vitamins (the B vitamins), anti-oxidants and other protective vitamins such as C and E. In the future perhaps some experimental substances such as a refined vaccine or beta secretase lowering substances may prove to be helpful. Behaviors such as poor sleeping or pacing can improve with changes in the home environment or suggestions from a health professional.

Let's turn to the next Slide.

Summary

1. Stages of Alzheimer's disease
2. Symptoms
3. Helps for the family
4. Physician suggestions
5. Resources

I am close to the end of this final session, Session 3 on Progressive Memory Disorders. In this session I discussed the three stages of Alzheimer's disease, some of the early signs such as short-term memory loss, problems with communication and difficulties with decision-making. I identified the kinds of helps to ease care management and some of the suggestions that may come from the physician or other health professionals. Finally, I listed some important resources with toll free phone numbers for caregivers to keep handy.

Summary of Three-Part Series

In coming to the end of the series called Basics of Dementia, I would like to close with a summary of the important points of the whole series.

First in the three-part series was a discussion of Treatable Memory Disorders. If there are problems with short-term memory or other thinking functions, a medical evaluation is important. Some memory disorders result from changes in hormone balance, chemical abuse, misuse of medicines, low levels of vitamins in the body, infections, or stress. These are among some of the conditions that may result in poor memory function and difficulty carrying out ones daily routine. These conditions are treatable as discussed in the first session of the Basics of Dementia series, Treatable Memory Disorders.

In the second session of the three-part series, I focused on Vascular Memory Disorders, also known as Vascular Dementias. These are the memory disorders that result from changes in blood circulation or heart rhythms. Uncontrolled diabetes, blood pressure or irregular heart beat may lead to poor blood circulation in the brain and, consequently, a vascular memory disorder. Two common types of vascular dementia are multi-infarct dementia and Binswanger's disease. These conditions were discussed in the second session of the Basics of Dementia series on Vascular Dementias. A healthy lifestyle and good medical management may be able to slow down the decline associated with vascular dementia.

In this third session of the three-part series on Progressive Memory Disorders, I just talked about one of the most commonly occurring memory disorders that moves along slowly over a period of many years. This condition is known as Alzheimer's disease. In the beginning stage, Forgetfulness, the person with Alzheimer's disease may use reminders to remain self-sufficient.

In the second stage, Confusion, occasional assistance and available supervision may allow the person to manage some simple tasks and some self-care.

In the third stage, Severe Dementia, the person with Alzheimer's disease needs constant help and supervision regarding daily needs and personal care. Essentially, someone else serves as that person's memory.

Many resource people and programs are available to help people deal with progressive memory disorders. An important Resource is AlzOnline at (866) 260-2466.

Let's look at the last slide to strengthen this point about resources and to identify important toll free phone numbers to keep handy. Let's look at the next slide which points out a few national and state resources with toll free phone numbers to keep handy.

<p style="text-align: center;">National Resources</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AlzOnline (866)260-2466</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Alzheimer's Association (800)272-3900</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ElderLocator (800)677-1116</p> <p style="text-align: center;">* * * * *</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Florida Resources: Florida Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Florida Elder Helpline (800)963-5337</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Florida DOEA (850)414-2000</p>

This is the end of Session 3, Progressive Memory Disorders and the end of the three-part series, Basics of Dementia. This is Dr. Leilani Doty, the Administrator of the University of Florida Memory Disorder Clinic, one of thirteen such clinics or centers in the Alzheimer's Disease Initiative supported in part by the Florida Department of Elder Affairs.

Thank you for visiting Alzonline.net and this third session on Progressive Memory Disorders in the three-part series, Basics of Dementia.