

## **ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE**

### **PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **What is Alzheimer's Disease?**

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive disease of the brain and it is the most common form of dementia. Dementia is a decline in memory and ability to think clearly. Alzheimer's disease proceeds in stages over months and years with loss of intellectual functions severe enough to interfere with everyday life. It progresses at a different rate in each person. Forty-seven percent of adults over the age of 85 will develop some form of dementia.

#### **What causes Alzheimer's disease?**

Scientists do not know what causes the disease. Some risk factors *may* be:

- Age – incidence increases with every decade after 60 but can occur in younger people
- Family history of dementia
- The presence of a defective gene
- Gender - women get Alzheimer's disease more often than men
- Traumatic brain injury

#### **What are the signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease?**

Alzheimer's disease begins slowly and early signs may not be noticed. Mild forgetfulness may be the first symptom experienced. People with early stage Alzheimer's disease may have difficulty with the following:

- Remembering recent events, appointments or the names of familiar people.
- Paying bills and managing finances
- Driving

## What are the signs and symptoms (continued)?

As the disease progresses, the individual may:

- Repeat the same questions
- Forget to take medications
- Forget to eat meals
- Lose interest in hobbies
- Demonstrate behavioral problems such as agitation or irritability
- Become lost when driving
- Misplace objects

## What is the treatment for Alzheimer's disease?

Currently there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease. However, there are medications that may slow the progression of the disease. Alzheimer's disease is sometimes difficult to identify because other conditions (such as depression, thyroid disease, or certain vitamin deficiencies) may cause similar symptoms. Treatment can often improve the lives of many people with the disease. Therefore, it is important that people seek medical attention to rule out treatable causes of memory problems. Medications may be used to treat anxiety, agitation, sleep problems, or depression. Physical activity, a well balanced diet, social and recreational activities can help to preserve quality of life for the person with Alzheimer's disease. The care of individuals with this disease or other dementias is challenging but there are resources available to provide assistance.

## How can I learn more about Alzheimer's disease?

If you have questions about Alzheimer's disease, you may contact your physician or any of the following resources:

| Organization  | Contact           | Phone        |
|---|-------------------|--------------|
| Geriatric Health and Resource at Greenwich Hospital   | Loriann Contadino | 203.863.4374 |
| Alzheimer's Association of Fairfield County   |                   | 203.845.0010 |
| Web Resources   |                   |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alzheimer's Research Foundation: <a href="http://www.alzheimers-research.org/">http://www.alzheimers-research.org/</a> |                   |              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alzheimer's Association: <a href="http://www.alz.org/">http://www.alz.org/</a>   |                   |              |

For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at [www.greenhosp.org](http://www.greenhosp.org) and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education.

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