

Alzheimer's disease

INFORMATION SHEET FROM THE SWEDISH DEMENTIA CENTRE

Alzheimers sjukdom • faktablad på engelska

The most common type of dementia

Dementia is the generic term for a range of symptoms which make it harder to think, plan and communicate. The symptoms are caused by various diseases and injuries to the brain. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia, and accounts for 60–70 per cent of all cases of dementia.

Uncommon before the age of 65

It is estimated that in Sweden there are 100 000 people who suffer from Alzheimer's. The disease is uncommon before the age of 65, after which the risk of developing the illness increases with age. Less than four per cent of individuals in the age group 70–74 years have Alzheimer's disease, however more than one-third of individuals above 90 years of age suffer from the illness.

What goes on in the brain?

In an individual with Alzheimer's the protein beta amyloid starts to accumulate in and is stored between the nerve cells of the brain. The interior of the cells starts to form fibrils, small tangles which prevent the transport of essential nutritive substances. These unhealthy changes gradually spread to several parts of the brain. The course of the disease often extends over several years.

The disease develops gradually

Alzheimer's disease develops gradually. In many cases it is often confused with natural aging. Early symptoms include forgetfulness and difficulties orientating oneself in unfamiliar surroundings. It becomes harder to acquire new knowledge and things which used to be simple become more difficult to plan and execute. Anxiety is also associated with the disease.

Early signs of Alzheimer's:

- harder to acquire new knowledge
- forgetfulness
- difficulties expressing oneself
- anxiety

The symptoms increase and become stronger

Other abilities also deteriorate gradually, for example language, perception of time and judgement. The disease makes it increasingly difficult to communicate. Help with getting dressed, hygiene and personal care eventually become necessary.



Early diagnosis is important

Contact a doctor if you suspect that you have Alzheimer's disease. An examination should be carried out as soon as possible. It is not possible to confirm the disease through a simple test. Instead, the diagnosis is based on a variety of tests and examinations and interviews with relatives. The examination usually takes several weeks.

Treatment and reception

Great progress has been made in the research of Alzheimer's, however there is no method at present to slow down the course of the disease. There is however medication which can ease the symptoms, primarily at an early stage. Means of assistance and several other methods of help can facilitate the everyday life of those with Alzheimer's.

It is important that the symptoms are explained thoroughly in order to efficiently plan a good and meaningful life. As stress aggravates the symptoms, it is important to create a calm and peaceful environment for the individual with Alzheimer's.

Gradually additional assistance and support from the health care provided by society is required.

15 July 2013 • Svenskt Demenscentrum®

Additional information sheets in different languages are available on the Swedish Dementia Centre's website:
www.demenscentrum.se/Faktablad



Svenskt Demenscentrum

The Swedish Dementia Centre, Gävlegatan 16, 113 30 Stockholm, 08 - 690 58 00, info@demenscentrum.se

www.demenscentrum.se