

# CAREGIVER LINK

Alzheimer's disease is a leading cause of death in the United States, and millions of Americans are affected by the disease. It's important to distinguish the facts from the myths about Alzheimer's, especially when it comes to finding information online.

## 1. Alzheimer's disease and dementia are the same thing

People often use the terms Alzheimer's disease and dementia interchangeably, but there is a difference. Dementia refers to impaired memory, thinking, reasoning, and behavior, and Alzheimer's is just one type of dementia. The terms are likely confused because Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia and the most well-known. But there are other types of dementia, too, including Lewy body dementia, frontotemporal dementia, and vascular dementia.

## 2. I will develop Alzheimer's disease if my parent has it

If a parent or close relative has Alzheimer's disease, you may be worried about developing it as you get older. A person's chance of developing Alzheimer's is higher if they have certain genetic mutations or variations that can be passed down from a parent. However, just because a biological parent has Alzheimer's does not mean that their children will develop it.

Alzheimer's disease is complex, and scientists don't yet fully understand what causes it in most people. Research suggests that in most individuals, a host of factors beyond genetics play a role in the development and course of the disease. Environmental and lifestyle factors, such as exercise, diet, exposure to pollutants, and smoking may also affect a person's risk for Alzheimer's. Although we don't yet know how to prevent Alzheimer's, it's important to practice healthy behaviors throughout your lifetime, such as exercising regularly and eating a balanced diet.

## 3. Only people in their 70s and older get Alzheimer's disease

While the greatest known risk factor for Alzheimer's is age, that does not mean that only older adults develop it. For



most people with Alzheimer's, it's true that symptoms first appear in their mid-60s or beyond. However, some people experience symptoms earlier, even as young as their 30s. When a person develops Alzheimer's between their 30s and mid-60s, it's called early-onset Alzheimer's. Early-onset Alzheimer's is rare — representing less than 10% of people with Alzheimer's. Developing Alzheimer's earlier in life can present specific challenges. People diagnosed at younger ages may be more likely to be raising children who are still at home or managing work and having to apply for disability than those who are diagnosed at older ages.

Many people with Down syndrome, a genetic condition, will also develop Alzheimer's at an earlier age and may begin to show symptoms in their 40s.

## 4. Alzheimer's disease symptoms are normal as we get older

Many people become more forgetful as they age, and some forgetfulness, such as losing things from time to time, is normal. However, common signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's, such as making poor judgments and decisions a lot of the time, having problems recognizing friends and family, or losing track of the date or time of year are not a normal part of aging.

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If you are worried about your memory or other possible Alzheimer's symptoms, talk with your doctor. The doctor may ask questions about your health history, perform assessments of your thinking and memory, and carry out medical tests to determine your diagnosis.

#### **5. There are no treatments available for people with Alzheimer's disease**

There has been significant progress toward developing better treatments for people with Alzheimer's. Several medications are available that can help treat people with Alzheimer's disease. There are also coping strategies to help manage behavioral symptoms.



While there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease, thanks to scientific advances, research has never been more promising. In total, NIA is funding more than 250 clinical trials including both drug and nondrug interventions. These include testing treatments that target behavior and lifestyle factors as well as underlying causes of the disease.

#### **6. If I'm frequently forgetting things, it must be Alzheimer's disease**

Even though memory problems are typically one of the first signs of Alzheimer's, not all memory problems mean a person has the disease. Some forgetfulness is normal as we age.

Talk with your doctor to determine whether the memory changes you're noticing are normal or may be a sign of something more serious. In some cases, depression or medication side effects can cause memory and other thinking problems. With treatment, it may be possible to reverse some memory problems due to these reasons.

#### **7. You can buy supplements online to prevent or cure Alzheimer's disease**

There are many websites and advertisements that promise certain supplements can effectively treat or cure diseases such as Alzheimer's. In some cases, these may seem reliable, offering advice on healthy aging and Alzheimer's to gain people's trust and promote their products. However, there is no scientific evidence backing these claims, and currently, no supplement has been proven to delay, prevent, treat, or cure Alzheimer's.

Talk with your doctor before taking any supplements or trying any other new treatments.

#### **8. You can prevent Alzheimer's disease**

There is no proven way to prevent Alzheimer's. However, there are steps you can take to help reduce your risk for this disease. A risk factor is something that may increase a person's chance of developing a disease. Some risk factors can be controlled, while others, such as the genes you inherit, cannot.

In general, leading a healthy lifestyle may help reduce risk factors that have been associated with Alzheimer's and other age-related health problems. These include:

- Controlling high blood pressure
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Staying mentally and physically active
- Preventing head injury
- Sleeping seven to nine hours each night

With summer coming, the potential for dangerously high heat increases. The Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA) is providing important tips to help families affected by Alzheimer's disease and other dementia-related illnesses keep their loved ones safe.

"The dangers of extreme temperatures, which can cause heat stroke in a matter of minutes, are magnified for someone living with dementia. Dementia-related illnesses can impair a person's ability to know when they are thirsty or in danger of overheating, communicate basic needs, and remember heat safety protocols," said Jennifer Reeder, LCSW, SIFI, AFA's Director of Educational and Social Services. "Taking a few simple precautions can go a long way toward keeping your loved one safe."

AFA advises family caregivers to take the following steps:

- Help the person stay hydrated - Alzheimer's disease and other dementia-related illnesses can diminish a person's ability to know when they are thirsty, making it critically important for caregivers to monitor them and encourage them to drink frequently. Avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages, as these drinks may contribute to dehydration.

- Watch for hyperthermia - Dementia-related illnesses can impair a person's ability to communicate or recognize basic needs, so caregivers cannot solely depend on waiting for the person to express that they are too hot or need to cool off. Hyperthermia is an abnormally high body temperature caused by the body's inability to regulate heat from the environment. Seniors and people with chronic medical conditions are most at risk. One life-threatening form of hyperthermia is heat stroke, a dangerous elevation in body temperature sparked by exposure to extreme environmental heat or the troublesome mixture of heat and humidity. Watch for warning signs such as excessive sweating, exhaustion, flushed or red skin, muscle cramps, a fast pulse, headaches, dizziness, and nausea.

- Watch out for wandering - Wandering is a very common behavior among individuals with Alzheimer's disease, and it's also very dangerous, as they can easily become lost or disoriented and not know how, or who, to call for help. It's even

more dangerous in extreme heat conditions, where hyperthermia can develop in a matter of minutes. Wandering can occur when the person has limited stimulation, so be sure to engage the person in physical stimulation by walking around the home, and mental stimulation through activities and engaging in conversations. Ensure the person's basic needs (water,



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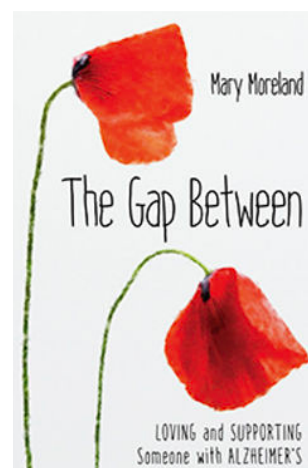
[www.dementiaminds.org](http://www.dementiaminds.org)

*"Your life is the message to the world, make sure it is inspiring."*

*"A good laugh and a long sleep are the two best cures for anything."*

*"Everyday is an adventure, so enjoy the journey."*

Detailing her first-hand experience caring for a parent with Alzheimer's, author Mary Moreland translates her most painful journey into help for other families facing the devastating illness.





Adult Day Care is a community-based program. If you are considering an adult day health care program, here are some tips to help you choose.

**There are two types:**

- **Medical Model Adult Day Health Care Program** offers adults who are chronically ill or in need of health monitoring access to nursing care, rehabilitation therapy, social work services, and assistance with personal care. Medical model programs have a registered nurse and rehabilitation therapists on site and are affiliated and licensed under nursing homes.
- **Social Model Adult Day Health Care Program** provides seniors with supervised care in a safe environment, as well as a place to socialize and stay physically and mentally active.

Most adult day programs provide door-to-door, round-trip transportation. The vans should be equipped with an electronic lift and other equipment to accommodate people in wheelchairs, walkers, or canes.

Ask yourself some questions when visiting the adult day care health care programs. What's the first impression you have after walking through the door? Are the staff and patients happily engaged in activities together? Are the recreation and dining areas clean? Are the walls brightly decorated with patients' artwork? Are the activities offered age appropriate for me?

Every adult day program must have a medical and safety emergency plan. Ask the program's director or the person who takes you on a tour to show you the written plan. Feel free to ask questions. For example: What's the procedure if someone goes into diabetic shock; or if someone falls?

food, using the restroom, etc.) are being met, as wandering can often stem from an unmet need. Keep a recent photo and medical information on hand, as well as information about familiar destinations they used to frequent, to share with emergency responders to aid in search and rescue efforts if the person does wander.

- Look for signs that something is amiss, including hot, dry skin, rapid pulse, dizziness, or sudden changes in mental status.
- Take immediate action - Resting in an air-conditioned room, removing clothing, applying cold compresses, and drinking fluids can help cool the body. If the person faints, exhibits excessive confusion or becomes unconscious, consider this a medical emergency and call 911.
- Know where to cool down - Many municipalities will open up air conditioned "cooling centers" where people who do not have air conditioning can go to cool down. These can include senior centers, libraries, community centers and other municipal/public buildings. If your person does not have air conditioning, find out if there are cooling centers nearby.
- Plan – Blackouts and other power failures can sometimes occur during heat waves. Make sure that cell phones, tablets, and other electrical devices are fully charged. Flashlights should be easily accessible in case of a power failure. Have the emergency contact numbers for local utility providers, as well as the police and fire departments, readily accessible.
- Have a long-distance plan if necessary - If you don't live near your loved one, arrange for someone who does to check on them. Inform them of emergency contacts and where important medical information can be found, such as their insurance card. Make sure the person has plenty of water and access to air-conditioning or other cooling mechanisms.

Families who have questions or would like additional information about caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease can speak with a licensed social worker seven days a week through the AFA Helpline by calling 866-232-8484, web chatting at [www.alzfdn.org](http://www.alzfdn.org), or sending a text message to 646-586-5283. The web chat and text message features can serve individuals in more than 90 different languages.



***Join a growing movement of people like you who are helping family or fellow community members living with dementia. A little support can make a big difference in their lives.***  
**Be a Dementia Friend!**

**What Makes You a Dementia Friend and How to Become One?**

Attend a FREE one-hour informational session where you'll learn what dementia is, what it's like to live with it, tips for communicating with people who have dementia and how you can support them with the changes in thinking in memory. Schedule your session TODAY by emailing:

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ou need your sense of balance to stand, walk, bend down, drive, and more. If it gets disrupted, you may struggle to work, study, or even do simple daily activities. Balance problems also increase the risk of dangerous falls.

“Balance is really your sixth sense,” says Dr. David Newman-Toker, a neurologist at Johns Hopkins University. “But we’re not usually aware of it, unless it’s broken.”

Many things can affect your balance. Being hungry or dehydrated may make you feel lightheaded. Some medications can make you feel dizzy. Health problems that affect your inner ear or brain can also throw off your balance. These may include infection, stroke, or a tumor.

Usually, a disruption in balance is temporary. But some things can cause long-term balance problems. So how do you know when to be concerned?

“If your symptoms are severe, or last for a long time, that’s an indication to have things checked out,” says Dr. Michael Hoa, an ear, nose, and throat specialist at National Institute for Health. “Pay attention to things that aren’t normal for you.”

You may feel like you’re moving, spinning, or floating, even if you’re sitting or lying still. Or you could feel like you’re suddenly tipping over while you’re walking. You might have blurred vision or feel confused or disoriented.

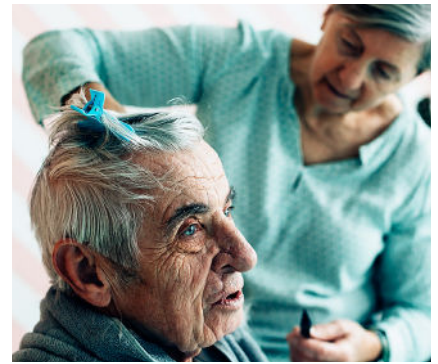
### **Pinpointing the Problem**

Tiny organs in your inner ear form the core of your balance system. They communicate with your brain to give you a sense of your body’s position.

“But your balance system isn’t just your inner ear,” Hoa says. “It’s input from your eyes. It’s your muscles, joints, and spine. It’s your vision.”

That makes balance disorders tricky to diagnose. “A change in any part of the system could contribute to changes in your balance,” he says. “Sometimes that makes it hard to distinguish one balance disorder from another.”

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In an emergency, how are clients evacuated from the center? Ask if they have a defibrillator on the premise.

Adult day programs should have a posted weekly or monthly calendar of activities and events or ask for it when you’re on your tour. Offerings should range from group activities like exercise programs and drumming circles to activities such as arts and crafts, dominoes, or crocheting. Ask whether they provide trips to area attractions. It will quickly become apparent if the program is going the extra step to keep individuals motivated and actively engaged.

Adult day programs generally provide at least one healthy meal and a snack during the day. Specialty diets are accommodated at most programs. Ask the center for a copy of their weekly or monthly menu.

Your loved one may need some assistance with personal grooming. Does the program have adequate staff to handle those needs, such as toileting, showering and other personal care? And does the staff handle toileting with sensitivity allowing the individual to maintain their dignity?

After evaluating and experiencing a few adult day health care programs, seeing the range of activities and enthusiasm of the staff, looking at the menus and simply “getting the feel” of the programs, you’ll be in a better position to select the program that you feel is the most appropriate for your loved one.



A new balance problem can sometimes signal a medical emergency, like a stroke. So, it's important to get symptoms checked out as soon as possible.

"The most important things to tell your health care provider are the timing and triggers for your symptoms," says Newman-Toker. This will help them narrow down the possible cause.

### **Common Causes of Balance Problems**

Identifying what's causing a balance problem can be complicated. Several disorders have similar symptoms.

An infection or inflammation of the inner ear can trigger dizziness and loss of balance. This is called labyrinthitis. Inflammation can also affect the nerve that sends signals about balance to the brain. This is called vestibular neuritis.

The most common cause of dizzy spells is called benign paroxysmal positional vertigo, or BPPV. This occurs when tiny crystals in the inner ear fall out of place. BPPV can cause a brief, intense sense of vertigo triggered by certain changes in the position of your head. The spells last less than a minute.

A less common, but recurrent, cause of balance problems is Ménière's disease. This can cause vertigo, hearing loss, and a ringing or buzzing sensation in the ear. It's not known what causes this condition. But people living with it often have extra fluid in their inner ear.

To determine what's causing your symptoms, your health care provider can do different tests. These include a hearing exam, blood tests, or tests to measure your eye movements. If these tests can't rule out a stroke, you may also need an MRI scan.

Newman-Toker's team is experimenting with goggles that measure eye movements automatically. They're testing whether the goggles can help doctors in the emergency department make better diagnoses.

Father's Day is always celebrated on the third Sunday in June.

Many people assume Father's Day is a holiday designed by greeting card makers to turn a profit. The story behind how this day became a holiday is actually a tale of determination by one woman and a decades-long fight to get fathers recognition.

Some attribute the first Father's Day observance to the 1907 mining disaster that killed 361 men—250 of them fathers—and which left more than a thousand children without a dad. A woman whose father was killed in the tragedy suggested a service of commemoration to her pastor. But it never really caught on as an annual observance.

Two years later, in May of 1909, Sonora Louise Smart Dodd of Spokane, Washington, heard a Mother's Day sermon in her hometown church and thought a similar day should be set aside to honor fathers. Her own father, a Civil War veteran, raised six children as a single parent. On June 6, 1910, Dodd approached the Spokane Ministerial Association and the local Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) with her petition outlining the idea for an annual observance, and she received overwhelming support. Spokane held its first Father's Day celebration on Sunday, June 19, 1910.

The first U.S. President to celebrate it was Woodrow Wilson in June of 1916. Wilson liked the idea so much of a day of observation for fathers that he pushed to make it a national holiday (he had just made Mother's Day official in 1915), but members of Congress resisted,

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Because some balance disorders can look similar, people may not always get the right diagnosis and treatment on the first try, says Newman-Toker. You may need to visit another doctor or try different treatments before you feel better.

### Finding What Works

Some balance disorders have straightforward treatments. But others can be tricky. For BPPV, a trained health care provider can perform a series of simple head movements. These move the loose crystals back in place.

Ménière's disease is harder to treat. Lifestyle changes like stopping smoking and eating less salt can sometimes reduce symptoms. New drugs are now being tested to treat Ménière's disease in clinical studies.



Hoa's lab is trying to identify possible causes of Ménière's disease. They're looking at how genes, proteins, and the body's disease defense system (the immune system) may be involved. They suspect that what's currently called Ménière's disease may be several different conditions. Pinpointing the differences may lead to more personalized treatments.

But currently, few effective drugs exist for long-term balance problems, says Dr. Anat Lubetzky, a physical therapist at New York University. "For many people, the solution to a balance problem is balance rehabilitation." Rehabilitation teaches you ways to adapt to dizzy spells. It also focuses on strengthening muscles and preventing falls.

"People with balance disorders can enter a vicious cycle of the fear of falling," Lubetzky says. "They may avoid activity, which can then create muscle and bone problems."

That, in turn, can increase the risk of more falls. "You have to gain your confidence back," she says.

Lubetzky is researching the use of virtual reality, or VR, to better understand and treat balance disorders. Many people with balance disorders struggle in environments with a lot of sights and sounds. So, her lab creates virtual scenes, like subway stations, for rehab sessions. These scenes let people practice walking in small virtual crowds.

As people build their skills, the scenes can get busier and noisier. The team hopes that these programs will help people regain their confidence in busy environments without leaving the safety of the clinic.

Whether it's rehab, medications, or other treatments, it may take time to find something that works for you.

"If things don't go how you've been told to expect them to, be aware that you might actually not have the right diagnosis," Newman-Toker says. You may need to go back to your health care provider or see a specialist.

It may also take time to gain your confidence back. In the meantime, anyone living with a balance disorder—either temporarily or permanently—can also do simple things at home to prevent falls and accidents.

*The Origin of Father's Day, continued from page 6*

fearing that such a day would take away support from the Mother's Day holiday.

The effort to formally recognize a day for fathers met with more hurdles over the years. In 1924, President Calvin Coolidge urged states to observe the day nationwide but refused to issue an official proclamation for the holiday, and by the 1930s there was an effort to combine Mother's Day and Father's Day into a single "Parent's Day" holiday.

Maine's U.S. Senator, Margaret Chase Smith, had her own thoughts on the matter. When the holiday efforts reached another stalemate in Congress, Chase-Smith penned a harsh memo in which she declared, "Either we honor both our parents, mother, and father, or let us desist from honoring either one. But to single out just one of our two parents and omit the other is the most grievous insult imaginable."

More than 50 years after Dodd's initial efforts, Father's Day was recognized as a holiday on the third Sunday of June by President Lyndon Johnson's Executive Order in 1966. But it was still not officially recognized as a federal holiday until six years later when, during his re-election campaign, Richard Nixon signed an official proclamation setting Father's Day permanently on the third Sunday in June nationwide.





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