



TESS Newsletter

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Episode 150

“ Turning Possibilities into Realities ”

## Building a Global Movement for Change [UNSG]: The Promise (part 81)



## "Working Hard at Working Smart" (part 101)

# Understanding Alzheimer's Disease



**“No matter who you are, what you've accomplished, what your financial situation is - when you're dealing with a parent with Alzheimer's, you yourself feel helpless. The parent can't work, can't live alone, and is totally dependent, like a toddler. As the disease unfolds, you don't know what to expect.”**

Maria Shriver

## The future we want: The Promise: The Force Beyond

### Early-Onset Alzheimer's: Should You Worry?

By Troy Rohn

#### The Conversation

You have forgotten where you put your car keys, or you can't seem to remember the name of your colleague you saw in the grocery store the other day. You fear the worst; maybe these are signs of Alzheimer's disease.

You're not alone: a recent study asking Americans aged 60 or older the condition they were most afraid of getting indicated the number one fear was Alzheimer's or dementia (35 percent), followed by cancer (23 percent), and stroke (15 percent).

And when we hear of someone like legendary basketball Coach Pat Summitt dying on June 28 from early-onset Alzheimer's at age 64, fears are heightened.

#### Memory loss is normal; Alzheimer's is not

Alzheimer's is an irreversible, progressive brain disease that slowly destroys memory and thinking skills, leading to cognitive impairment that severely affects daily living. Often the terms Alzheimer's and dementia are used interchangeably and although the two are related, they are not the same. Dementia is a general term for the loss of memory or other mental abilities that affect daily life. Alzheimer's is a cause of dementia, with over 70 percent of all dementia cases occurring as a result of Alzheimer's.

The majority of Alzheimer's cases occur in people aged 65 years or older.

Slight memory loss is a normal consequence of aging, and people therefore should not be overly concerned if they lose their keys or forget the name of a neighbor at the grocery store. If these things happen infrequently, there is scant reason to worry. You most likely do not have Alzheimer's if you simply forgot one time where you parked upon leaving Disneyland or the local mall during the holidays.

How do you know when forgetfulness is part of the normal aging process and when it could be a symptom of Alzheimer's?

Here are 10 early signs and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.

A key point to consider is whether these symptoms significantly affect daily living. If so, then Alzheimer's disease might be the cause.



For every one of these 10 symptoms of Alzheimer's, there is also a typical age-related change that is not indicative of Alzheimer's disease. For example, an early symptom of Alzheimer's is memory loss including forgetting important dates or events and asking for the same information numerous times over. A typical age-related change may be sometimes forgetting names and appointments, but remembering them later.

People frequently ask if they might be afflicted with the disease if a grandparent had Alzheimer's. The majority of Alzheimer's cases occur in people aged 65 years or older. These individuals are classified as having what is known as late-onset Alzheimer's. In late-onset Alzheimer's, the cause of the disease is unknown (e.g. sporadic), although advancing age and inheriting certain genes may play an important role. Importantly, although there are several known genetic risk factors associated with late-onset Alzheimer's, inheriting any one of these genes does not assure a prognosis of Alzheimer's as one advances in age.

# 10 Early Signs and Symptoms of Alzheimer's

Memory loss that disrupts daily life may be a symptom of Alzheimer's or another dementia. Alzheimer's is a brain disease that causes a slow decline in memory, thinking and reasoning skills. There are 10 warning signs and symptoms. Every individual may experience one or more of these signs in a different degree. If you notice any of them, please see a doctor.

## 1. MEMORY LOSS THAT DISRUPTS DAILY LIFE

One of the most common signs of Alzheimer's is memory loss, especially forgetting recently learned information. Others include forgetting important dates or events; asking for the same information over and over; increasingly needing to rely on memory aids (e.g., reminder notes or electronic devices) or family members for things they used to handle on their own.

### *What's a typical age-related change?*

Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.

## 2. CHALLENGES IN PLANNING OR SOLVING PROBLEMS

Some people may experience changes in their ability to develop and follow a plan or work with numbers. They may have trouble following a familiar recipe or keeping track of monthly bills. They may have difficulty concentrating and take much longer to do things than they did before.

### *What's a typical age-related change?*

Making occasional errors when balancing a checkbook.

### GET CHECKED — EARLY DETECTION MATTERS

If you notice any of the 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's in yourself or someone you know, don't ignore them. Schedule an appointment with your doctor.

## 3. DIFFICULTY COMPLETING FAMILIAR TASKS AT HOME, AT WORK OR AT LEISURE

People with Alzheimer's often find it hard to complete daily tasks. Sometimes, people may have trouble driving to a familiar location, managing a budget at work or remembering the rules of a favorite game.

### *What's a typical age-related change?*

Occasionally needing help to use the settings on a microwave or to record a television show.



## 4. CONFUSION WITH TIME OR PLACE

People with Alzheimer's can lose track of dates, seasons and the passage of time. They may have trouble understanding something if it is not happening immediately. Sometimes they may forget where they are or how they got there.

### *What's a typical age-related change?*

Getting confused about the day of the week but figuring it out later.

## 5. TROUBLE UNDERSTANDING VISUAL IMAGES AND SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS

For some people, having vision problems is a sign of Alzheimer's. They may have difficulty reading, judging distance and determining color or contrast, which may cause problems with driving.

Be prepared for the changes Alzheimer's brings.

### *What's a typical age-related change?*

Vision changes related to cataracts.

## 6. NEW PROBLEMS WITH WORDS IN SPEAKING OR WRITING

People with Alzheimer's may have trouble following or joining a conversation. They may stop in the middle of a conversation and have no idea how to continue or they may repeat themselves. They may struggle with vocabulary, have problems finding the right word or call things by the wrong name (e.g., calling a "watch" a "hand-clock").

### *What's a typical age-related change?*

Sometimes having trouble finding the right word.

## Alzheimer's Disease



Healthy Brain



Mild Alzheimer's Disease



Severe Alzheimer's Disease

### 7. MISPLACING THINGS AND LOSING THE ABILITY TO RETRACE STEPS

A person with Alzheimer's disease may put things in unusual places. They may lose things and be unable to go back over their steps to find them again. Sometimes, they may accuse others of stealing. This may occur more frequently over time.

***What's a typical age-related change?***  
Misplacing things from time to time and retracing steps to find them.

### 8. DECREASED OR POOR JUDGMENT

People with Alzheimer's may experience changes in judgment or decision-making. For example, they may use poor judgment when dealing with money, giving large amounts to telemarketers. They may pay less attention to grooming or keeping themselves clean.

***What's a typical age-related change?***  
Making a bad decision once in a while.

### 9. WITHDRAWAL FROM WORK OR SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

A person with Alzheimer's may start to remove themselves from hobbies, social activities, work projects or sports. They may have trouble keeping up with a favorite sports team or remembering how to complete a favorite hobby. They may also avoid being social because of the changes they have experienced.

***What's a typical age-related change?***  
Sometimes feeling weary of work, family and social obligations.

### 10. CHANGES IN MOOD AND PERSONALITY

The mood and personalities of people with Alzheimer's can change. They can become confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful or anxious. They may be easily upset at home, at work, with friends or in places where they are out of their comfort zone.

***What's a typical age-related change?***  
Developing very specific ways of doing things and becoming irritable when a routine is disrupted.

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**"If you don't have imagination, you stop being human; animals don't have imagination; Alzheimer's is the death of imagination."**

*Devdutt Pattanaik*

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**"It seems that when you have cancer you are a brave battler against the disease, but when you have Alzheimer's you are an old fart. That's how people see you. It makes you feel quite alone."**

*Terry Pratchett*

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**"With Alzheimer's patients, you have to be very careful what you say when you're looking at them over their bed. Because once in a while, they understand it."**

*Nancy Reagan*

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The journey continues...