The “Other” Dementias

While Alzheimer’s disease is the most well known, it is not the only form of dementia. Knowing more about dementia can assist you in getting the most effective help for your loved one. There are more than 100 causes of dementia but four causes make up 94-98% of case and those are: Alzheimer’s disease (65%), Lewy body dementia (10-12%), frontotemporal dementia (8%) and vascular dementia (10-12%). Alzheimer’s disease tends to strike people who are in their 70’s and 80’s while the other dementias can strike much younger, even down into the 40’s and 50’s.

Alzheimer’s Disease (AD)
Affects the hippocampus at the base of the cortex. Symptoms are mainly memory problems often followed by confusion, apathy, depression, emotional volatility, and other symptoms.

Lewy Body Dementia (LBD)
Affects the entire brain. Symptoms include cognitive decline but patients tend to fluctuate in terms of attention and alertness. Patients tend to eventually develop Parkinson-like symptoms.

Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD)
Affects the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain. Patients develop speech problems such as halting speech or word finding problems. Behavioral problems are common such as indifference to others or shoplifting.

Vascular Dementia
Since this is the result of mini-strokes, it affects the entire brain and symptoms vary widely.

Extracted from The “Other” Dementias, Tom Valeo; Neurology Now, November/December 2009.

Resources:
http://memory.ucsf.edu/
http://neurologynow.com
http://www.ftd-picks.org/
called, amyloid plaques, consisting of clumps of protein that have been found around and between the neurons, and neurofibrillary tangles, that are the result of unraveled protein which forms as a tangled mass inside the cell (Special Report, 2008). Some have suggested that there is an inflammatory component to Alzheimer’s disease and the inflammation causes a release of toxic compounds and free radicals that eventually damage and kill the brain cells. It has been found that C-reactive protein (CRP), which is an indicator of inflammation, has been linked to an increased risk for Alzheimer’s disease (Whitaker, 2007).

What are the Signs & Symptoms? It is important to recognize the symptoms of this disease and begin treatment as early as possible. It is also important not to confuse normal aging experiences with Alzheimer’s disease. The common symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease are not the typical signs of aging as outlined in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs of Alzheimer’s</th>
<th>Typical age-related changes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor judgment and decision making</td>
<td>Making a bad decision once in a while</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inability to manage a budget</td>
<td>Missing a monthly payment</td>
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<td>Losing track of the date or the season</td>
<td>Forgetting which day it is and remembering later</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty having a conversation</td>
<td>Sometimes forgetting which word to use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Misplacing things and being unable to retrace steps to find them</td>
<td>Losing things from time to time</td>
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If you have noticed several of these warning signs in yourself or a loved one, a physician consult is recommended (Alzheimer’s Association alz.org).

What Can I Do to Prevent Alzheimer’s Disease? According to an article from Johns Hopkins University physician, Majid Fotuhi (2008), there are steps, which are based on scientific research that can be taken to reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease. These steps are as follows:

- Strive to be fit by having a waist measurement that is no more than half your height (in inches)
- Keep blood glucose levels below 100mg/dl
- Do not smoke
- Include at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise in your day
- Include antioxidants in your diet
- Eating fruits and vegetables (the more colorful, the better)
- Include curcumin (found in curry powder) in your diet

Other recommendations for nutrient intake that have been shown to increase brain health and may help to prevent Alzheimer’s are, vitamin B6, vitamin B12, omega-3, omega-6, folate, vitamin E, coffee, green or black tea, and nuts, especially almonds, walnuts, and pecans (Welland, 2007).

Is There a Treatment for Alzheimer’s Disease? At this time there is no cure for Alzheimer’s disease and treatment is given specifically to manage the symptoms of the disease. Medications called cholinesterase inhibitors help stabilize brain functions. The common names for some the drugs used for mild to moderate stages of Alzheimer’s disease, include Aricept, Exelon, and Razadyne. A newer drug called Namenda, has been found to be effective for moderate to severe cases, but seems to slow down the ability to perform activities of daily living. Until there is a cure, there are several helpful things that a caregiver can keep in mind to make life easier and less confusing for someone suffering from Alzheimer’s. It is helpful to stick to a daily routine, break tasks down into small steps, limit choices, be respectful and reassuring, avoid large and noisy settings, and limit visitors (Special Report, 2008).

If you think that you or a loved one may have Alzheimer’s disease, an evaluation can be done by your family physician and can assist in determining a diagnosis. If you would like more information on this disease, you can visit the Alzheimer’s Association website at: http://www.alz.org/index.asp

References:

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