



DO MEMORY PROBLEMS *Always Mean Alzheimer's Disease?*

Many people worry about becoming forgetful. They think forgetfulness is the first sign of Alzheimer's disease. But not all people with memory problems have Alzheimer's. Other causes for memory problems can include aging, medical conditions, emotional problems, mild cognitive impairment, or another type of dementia.

AGE-RELATED CHANGES IN MEMORY

Forgetfulness can be a normal part of aging. As people get older, changes occur in all parts of the body, including the brain. As a result, some people may notice that it takes longer to learn new things, they don't remember information as well as they did, or they lose things like their glasses. These usually are signs of mild forgetfulness, not serious memory problems, like Alzheimer's disease

Memory Loss Related to Medical Conditions

Certain medical conditions can cause serious memory problems. These problems should go away once a person

gets treatment. Medical conditions that may cause memory problems include:

- » Tumors, blood clots, or infections in the brain
- » Some thyroid, kidney, or liver disorders
- » Chronic alcoholism
- » Head injury, such as a concussion from a fall or accident
- » Medication side effects
- » Not eating enough healthy foods, or too few vitamins and minerals in a person's body (like vitamin B12)

A doctor should treat serious medical conditions like these as soon as possible.

MEMORY LOSS RELATED TO EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

Emotional problems, such as stress, anxiety, or depression,

can make a person more forgetful and can be mistaken for dementia. For instance, someone who has recently retired or who is coping with the death of a spouse, relative, or friend may feel sad, lonely, worried, or bored. Trying to deal with these life changes leaves some people feeling confused or forgetful.

The confusion and forgetfulness caused by emotions usually are temporary and go away when the feelings fade. Emotional problems can be eased by supportive friends and family, but if these feelings last for a long time, it is important to get help from a doctor or counselor. Treatment may include counseling, medication, or both. Being active and learning new skills can also help a person feel better and improve his or her memory.

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH FORGETFULNESS

People with some forgetfulness can use a variety of techniques that may help them stay healthy and deal with changes in their memory and mental skills. Here are some tips:

- » Learn a new skill.
- » Stay involved in activities that can help both the mind and body.
- » Volunteer in your community, at a school, or at your place of worship.
- » Spend time with friends and family.
- » Use memory tools such as big calendars, to-do lists, and notes to yourself.
- » Put your wallet or purse, keys, and glasses in the same place each day.
- » Get lots of rest.
- » Exercise and eat well.
- » Don't drink a lot of alcohol.
- » Get help if you feel depressed for weeks at a time.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NORMAL AGING AND ALZHEIMERS

Normal Aging	Alzheimer's Disease
» Making a bad decision once in a while	» Making poor judgments and decisions a lot of the time
» Missing a monthly payment	» Problems taking care of monthly bills
» Forgetting which day it is and remembering it later	» Losing track of the date or time of year
» Sometimes forgetting which word to use	» Trouble having a conversation
» Losing things from time to time	» Misplacing things often and being unable to find them