

AGING MATTERS: Alzheimer's Disease



McConnell

Every 68 seconds, someone in America develops Alzheimer's disease. Do you know an individual or family who has been impacted by Alzheimer's? Chances are you do. In fact, South Carolina is home to over 80,000 people living with Alzheimer's or a related disease. To put the figure into perspective, that number could completely fill Williams-Brice Stadium in Columbia.

From my own experience, I can attest to how challenging the disease is for a family. My brother, sisters, and I struggled with watching our mother fight this terribly cruel disease. Coined by Nancy Reagan as "the long goodbye," Alzheimer's disease, which is the most common form of dementia, causes problems with memory, thinking, and behavior. The disease typically affects those who are 65 and older, and, though relatively uncommon, signs of early onset Alzheimer's can appear in some adults as early as their 40s and 50s. Alzheimer's is a progressive disease that worsens as people age, and there is currently no known cure for the disease.

The greatest risk for Alzheimer's disease is advancing age. Those who have a family member (parent, sister, or brother) are more likely to develop the disease than those who do not have a

relative with Alzheimer's disease. Some of the warning signs of Alzheimer's disease include (courtesy of the Alzheimer's Association):

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life, especially forgetting recently learned information;
- Challenges in planning or solving problems, such as following a recipe or keeping track of monthly bills;
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work, or at leisure, such as driving to a familiar location;
- Repeated confusion with time or place;
- New problems remembering words in speaking or writing;
- Misplacing things often and losing the ability to retrace steps;
- Decreased or poor judgment, such as making bad decisions with money, telemarketing offers, or paying less attention to keeping themselves clean; or
- Withdrawal from work and social activities or changes in mood and personality.

To assist individuals living with Alzheimer's or a related disease, family members and friends play a vital role in taking care of their loved ones. In South Carolina during 2011, the economic value of unpaid caregiving was estimated to be \$3.9 billion, reflecting over 322 million hours from more than 283,000 caregivers across our state. Because caregivers often neglect their own health while taking care of their loved ones, it is important that caregivers take a break from their caregiving responsibilities.

If you would like to become involved with the Alzheimer's Association by volunteering (such as organizing a caregiver support group, donating your time in the office, or assisting in any number of ways) or if you need to reach them for help, call 1-800-272-3900 or visit www.alz.org/sc.

Question of the Week

Q:) With jobs and families of their own, where are family caregivers to turn for a break?

A:) Taking care of a family member places great demand on a caregiver. Thankfully, respite programs may be available for the primary family caregivers who need time away from their caregiving responsibilities (such as going to the grocery store, a doctor's appointment, or simply time away). For more information on respite vouchers available through the Alzheimer's Association, please call the South Carolina Chapter at 1-800-272-3900.

*For more information, contact the SC Lieutenant Governor's Office on Aging
(803-734-9900 or 800-868-9095) or visit www.aging.sc.gov.*