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Coping with the Diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease

SUPPORT GROUP

Mild Cognitive Impairment
Education & Support Group for
Families affected by MCI

Next Meeting: Oct. 16th

Time: 9:30 am

Topic: Herbals and
Alternative Medicine

Speaker: Michelle Demus,
Pharmacist, Sarasota Memorial

Location:
Senior Friendship
Center- Center for
Healthy Aging
1900 Brother Geenen
Way, Sarasota

Coping with the diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease can be very difficult for the person suffering with the illness. Because of the way Alzheimer's disease affects the brain, the diagnosis often comes as a complete surprise to the individual with the symptoms. The affects of a diagnosis of a long term illness like Alzheimer's are life altering. People with Alzheimer's disease eventually have to deal with losing abilities to do many of the things that they're used to doing themselves. Physical and mental changes from Alzheimer's disease can affect mood and can diminish positive self-image and reduce self-esteem. When people don't feel good about themselves, they often prefer isolation and withdraw from friends and social activities.

Alzheimer's disease can also influence the ability to function and get along at home. Confusion, feeling disoriented and unable to make sound decisions, may require modifications of activities and environment. Specific tasks may take longer to accomplish and staying organized and keeping a routine can help. As abilities change, there may be a feeling of loss of control and increased anxiety about what lies ahead. At some point making plans and accepting the help of others may become necessary.

In addition to all this, mood may go up and down. There may be feelings of anger, depression, loneliness and frustration, especially when first diagnosed. These feelings are normal, but if they interfere with the ability to enjoy life and do the things you normally enjoy, tell your doctor.

Make use of resources and support services offered in your community. There are support groups available for individuals in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease and their families, as well as numerous caregiver support groups for family members. Find out as much as you can about the illness and talk to friends and family. They will surely want to continue to be part of your life.

THE MEMORY DISORDER CLINIC

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Exercise Is Important

Exercise offers many benefits for people with Alzheimer's disease. In addition to improved strength, endurance, and heart fitness, exercise can also increase energy, and improve mood and sleep. Exercise also helps people with Alzheimer's disease preserve motor skills and improve balance, which in turn, can help prevent serious injury from falls. Recent studies indicate that exercise can help preserve mental function.

The type and intensity of exercise appropriate for someone with Alzheimer's disease depends on the person's degree of impairment. People in the early stages of the disease may enjoy exercises such as walking, bowling, dancing, golf, and swimming. Supervision may be necessary. Greater supervision may be required as the disease progresses. Activities that could lead to injury should be avoided.

It is important to talk to the person's doctor before beginning any exercise program. There may be other factors -- such as bone disease, a heart condition, or balance problems -- that could limit or restrict activity.

Tips to Promote Proper Nutrition

Good nutrition is important for people with Alzheimer's disease. In fact, poor nutrition can worsen some symptoms of dementia. To get your loved one to eat properly, try some of the following:

- Talk to your loved one's doctor - poor appetite can be due to depression, or other treatable problems.
- Do not force feed. Try to encourage the person to eat, and try to find out why they don't want to eat.
- Avoid serving non-nutritious beverages such as black coffee and tea.
- Try to get your loved one to eat more protein and fat and less simple sugars.

Proper Nutrition cont'd

- Offer small, frequent meals and snacks.
- Encourage your loved one to walk or participate in other types of light activity to stimulate appetite.
- Consider serving finger foods that are easy for the person to handle and eat.
- Remember to treat the person as an adult, not a child. Don't punish the person for not eating.
- Serve beverages after a meal instead of before or during a meal so that your loved one doesn't feel full before beginning to eat.
- Plan meals to include your loved one's favorite foods.
- Try getting your loved one to eat the high-calorie foods in the meal first.
- Use your imagination to increase the variety of food you're serving. Prepare meals that offer a variety of textures, colors, and temperatures.

Snack guidelines:

- Don't serve foods that provide little or no nutritional value, such as potato chips, candy bars, colas, and other snack foods.
- Choose high-protein and high-calorie snacks.

Dining guidelines:

- Make food preparation easy: choose foods that are easy to prepare and eat.
- Make eating a pleasurable experience, not a chore. Liven up your meals by using colorful place settings and/or play soothing background music during meals.
- Try not to let your loved one eat alone. If you are unable to eat with your loved one, invite a guest to share their meal.

Hypertension Harms the Brain

Over time, high blood pressure alters the cells of the inner linings of blood vessels, damaging them. Eventually, this damage may cause the very small blood vessels that nourish the brain to leak, tear or become blocked. Weak blood vessels may balloon outward to form a bulge known as an aneurysm that is susceptible to rupture. Damage to blood vessels can lead to transient ischemic attack (TIA) which is the temporary obstruction of blood flow to the brain or to a stroke. This is associated with damage to brain tissue and greater likelihood of cognitive impairment.

Hypertension also is associated with injury to the brain's white matter, where the myelin-covered axons that transmit messages among neurons are located. Research suggests that compared to people with normal blood pressure, individuals with hypertension have more white matter lesions and greater decline in cognitive function.

Practice the basic Relaxation Response technique once or twice a day to help control your blood pressure:

- Sit in a quiet place with your eyes closed. Pick a personal focus word, sound or phrase- for example "peace".
- Relax your muscles progressively from your feet to your head.
- Breathe slowly and naturally, repeating your focus word as you exhale.
- Gently dismiss thoughts that come to mind, returning to your repetition.
- After 10 to 20 minutes, sit quietly for a moment as you gradually allow your thoughts to return and open your eyes.

Courtesy of Massachusetts General Hospital



Time to update our Mailing List

Please contact our office by December 1, 2008 if you would like to remain on our newsletter mailing list.

There are 3 ways to contact us:

1. Calling our office at **941/917-7197**.
2. Complete and mail the reply portion on back page of newsletter to our office :
Memory Clinic
5880 Rand Blvd., #205
Sarasota, FL 34238
3. Email: Amy-sapanero@smh.com

This helps us keep mailing and printing costs under control. And as always you can receive our newsletter electronically. Just provide us with your email address.

FREE Memory Screenings

1st Wednesday of the month, 1-3 pm Senior Friendship Center, 2350 Scenic Drive, **Venice**

2nd Monday of the month, 2-4 pm Senior Friendship Center, Caregiver Resource Center 1820 Brother Geenen Way, **Sarasota**

For appointments call 941/917-7197

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Located just 1/2 mile from I-75 on the south side of Clark Road.

www.sarasotageriatrics.com