



Alzheimer's Disease Fact Sheet

Concern about Alzheimer's mounts as the population ages. The Michigan Department of Community Health joins with the National Alzheimer's Association and its Michigan chapters in spreading these key messages:

- Scientific evidence suggests individuals can take steps to help prevent or delay Alzheimer's.
- Prompt assessment when warning signs appear can lead to better symptom management, earlier access to helpful resources, and advance legal and financial planning – all of which lessen the burden of the disease.
- Information, advice, referrals, and help finding answers are one toll-free call away. Call 1-800-337-3827 in Michigan for connection to your nearest chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

The cause of Alzheimer's remains unknown but studies suggest that individuals can take steps to lower their risk. The Alzheimer's Association's Maintain Your Brain™ campaign recommends:

1. **Stay physically active** - Physical exercise is essential for maintaining good blood flow to the brain as well as to encourage new brain cells. It also can significantly reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke and diabetes, and thereby protect against those risk factors for Alzheimer's and other dementias.
2. **Stay mentally active** - Mentally stimulating activities strengthen brain cells and the connections between them, and may even create new nerve cells.
3. **Adopt a brain-healthy diet** - Research suggests that high cholesterol may contribute to stroke and brain cell damage. A low fat, low cholesterol diet is advisable. And there is growing evidence that a diet rich in dark vegetables and fruits, which contain antioxidants, may help protect brain cells.
4. **Remain socially involved** - Social activity not only makes physical and mental activity more enjoyable, it can reduce stress levels, which helps maintain healthy connections among brain cells.
5. **Be Heart Smart** - High blood pressure, heart disease and stroke are risk factors for dementia. So remember, what's good for the heart is good for the brain. Control your body weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar to help reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Possible warning signs should always be promptly evaluated to determine if there is a treatable cause. If the assessment leads to a diagnosis of Alzheimer's, Lewy Body disease, or vascular disease – the most common causes of dementia among those 65 and older – treatments are now available that can ease the symptoms. Early diagnosis ensures optimal treatment and access to resources that will help families cope with financial, legal, and care planning.

The Michigan Dementia Coalition and a network of primary care physicians across the state are working together to promote best practices for the early detection of dementia as well as best practices for appropriate assessment and treatment of the diseases that cause dementia. While specific elements of these best practices are still evolving, there is increasing agreement about what should be done to make the diagnosis and about the importance of certain treatment strategies. Be sure to discuss this best practice approach with your physician if you are concerned about the possibility of Alzheimer's or a related disease.

The Michigan Department of Community Health helps support the information and referral services of the Alzheimer's chapters in Michigan. It also helps support the Michigan Dementia Coalition in its efforts to improve the quality of life of persons with dementia and their caregivers. For more information, see www.dementiacoalition.org, www.alz.org, or call 1-800-337-3827.

10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

1. Memory loss – forgetting recently learned information
2. Difficulty with familiar tasks
3. Problems with language – frequently forgetting simple words or substituting unusual words
4. Disorientation to time and place
5. Poor or decreased judgment
6. Problems with abstract thinking
7. Misplacing things – putting things in unusual places such as keys in the frig
8. Rapid mood changes for no apparent reason
9. Personality changes – extreme confusion, suspicion, fearfulness or dependence
10. Loss of initiative

For a more complete explanation of these warning signs, see www.alz.org or call 1-800-337-3827.