

Alzheimer's Disease and the Female Connection

BY MARIE WOLF

Simply put, women develop Alzheimer's disease more frequently than men because women typically live longer—and longevity is the greatest risk factor.

Across the nation—of the more than 5 million afflicted with Alzheimer's—almost two-thirds are women. Here in New York, 400,000 men and women ages 65 and older have Alzheimer's disease, according to the Alzheimer's Association. And, 71 percent of those New Yorkers who care for those with Alzheimer's and dementia are women. Closer to home, Dr. Nikhil Palekar, Medical Director of the Stony Brook Center of Excellence for Alzheimer's Disease estimates that more than 54,000 Long Islanders are presently living with it.

BRAIN DRAIN

It's inevitable. As we age our brains age too. With normal aging, our processing speed slows down. "We are not as quick thinking as when we were younger," says Palekar. We forget names and appointments, but we remember them later on, he explains. However, Alzheimer's permanently robs you of your memory, your judgment and your delight in the simple pleasures you may have once enjoyed. Considered the most common form of dementia, Alzheimer's is a progressive disease in which the brain—the control center of the human body—gradually dies. In the end, Alzheimer's disease leads to a loss of bodily function, says Palekar. "You can't swallow. You can't speak. The lungs and the heart don't know how to function."

To date there is no cure, but Palekar says studies have found that 10-15 years before the first signs of

Alzheimer's appears, abnormal amounts of amyloid protein clumps that result in neuronal dysfunction can be detected in the brain in a significant number of people who will go on to develop Alzheimer's disease. Today, this can be detected on an amyloid PET scan, which helps identify those at higher risk for Alzheimer's, Palekar explains.



EVERY
65
SECONDS
↑ ↓
SOMEONE IN THE U.S.
DEVELOPS ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Source: Alzheimer's Association

SLOWING COGNITIVE DECLINE

Palekar says a recent study suggests physical activity is the most significant factor in delaying cognitive decline as it improves blood supply to the brain. Catherine

Anastasia, MPA, the Program Director of the Alzheimer's Association, Long Island, concurs. Aside from promoting good nutrition, exercise, socialization and cognitive stimulation, she says the Association has just embarked on "U.S. Pointer," a two-year Lifestyle

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“Caregivers are our heroes. They are amazing people and helping them is our job.”

Catherine Anastasia, MPA, Program Director, Alzheimer's Association, Long Island

Intervention trial to study brain health and its decline (for details email POINTERinfo@alz.org). Free support groups, caregiver training, Memory Café socials and more are offered across Long Island, as well as the Association's annual Caregiver Conference, coming this November. For details, go to alz.org or call their Helpline: 800-272-3900.

WHAT TO KNOW, WHERE TO GO

Having cognitive issues? Get screened. The Alzheimer's Foundation

of America (AFA) offers free memory screenings. President & CEO, Charles J. Fuschillo, Jr. says, “Getting the screening is critically important to start a discussion. It is not a diagnosis. And, it's important to know that not all memory issues are related to Alzheimer's, but you won't know until you are screened.”

Caregiver burnout is also of major concern. Coping and caring tools are offered through numerous AFA member organizations across Long Island. Additionally, the AFA's



Photo credit: Alzheimer's Foundation of America

The Alzheimer's Foundation of America Respite Care Relief Park, located next to Babylon Town Hall in Lindenhurst, offers solace to individuals and their caregivers.

“Educating America Tour,” will be held May 18 at the Crowne Plaza Times Square Hotel, NYC. For details on memory screening and programs: 866-232-8484; alzfdn.org.

Fuschillo adds, “Why we [Alzheimer's Foundation of America] were founded is something I remember every day. We want to be sure nobody goes on this journey alone.”

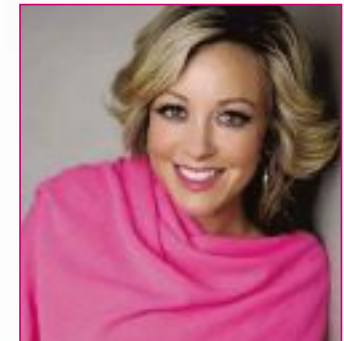
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