

**ALZHEIMER'S SYMPTOMS**

**1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life:** One of the most common signs of Alzheimer's is memory loss, especially forgetting recently learned information.

Other signs include forgetting important dates or events, repeatedly asking for the same information, relying on memory aides such as reminder notes or electronic devices or family members for things they used to handle on their own.

What's a typical age-related change? Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.

**2. Challenges in planning or solving problems:** Some people may experience changes in their ability to develop and follow a plan or work with numbers. They also may have trouble following a familiar recipe or keeping track of monthly bills. Additionally, people suffering from Alzheimer's may have difficulty concentrating and take much longer to do things than they did before.

What's a typical age-related change? Making occasional errors when balancing a checkbook.

**3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure:** People with Alzheimer's often find it hard to complete daily tasks. Sometimes, people may have trouble driving to a familiar location, managing a budget at work or remembering the rules of a favorite game.

What's a typical age-related change? Occasionally needing help to use the settings on a microwave or to record a television show.

**4. Confusion with time or place:** People with Alzheimer's can lose track of dates, seasons and the passage of time. They also may have trouble understanding something if it is not happening immediately. Sometimes they may forget where they are or how they got there.

What's a typical age-related change? Getting confused about the day of the week, but figuring it out later.

**5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships:** For some people, having vision problems is a sign of Alzheimer's. They may have difficulty reading, judging distance and determining color or contrast. In terms of perception, they may pass a mirror and think someone else is in the room — and not realize they are the person reflected in the mirror.

What's a typical age-related change? Vision changes related to cataracts.

**6. New problems with words in speaking or writing:** People with Alzheimer's may have trouble following or joining a conversation. They also may stop in the middle of a conversation and have no idea how to continue, or they may repeat themselves. Additionally, they may struggle with vocabulary, have problems finding the right word or call things by the wrong name, e.g., calling a "watch" a "hand-clock."

What's a typical age-related change? Sometimes having trouble finding the right word.

**7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps:** A person with Alzheimer's disease may put things in unusual places. They may lose things and be unable to go back over their steps to find them again. Sometimes, they may accuse others of stealing. This may occur more frequently over time.

What's a typical age-related change? Misplacing things from time to time, such as a pair of glasses or the remote control.

**8. Decreased or poor judgment:** People with Alzheimer's may experience changes in judgment or decision-making. For example, they may use poor judgment when dealing with money, such as giving large amounts to telemarketers. They also may pay less attention to grooming or keeping themselves clean.

What's a typical age-related change? Making a bad decision once in a while.

**9. Withdrawal from work or social activities:** A person with Alzheimer's may start to remove themselves from hobbies, social activities, work projects or sports. They also may have trouble keeping up with a favorite sports team or remembering how to complete a favorite hobby. Additionally, they may avoid being social because of the changes they have experienced.

What's a typical age-related change? Sometimes feeling weary of work, family and social obligations.

**10. Changes in mood and personality:** The mood and personalities of people with Alzheimer's can change. They can become confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful or anxious. They also may be easily upset at home, at work, with friends or in places where they are out of their comfort zone.

What's a typical age-related change? Developing very specific ways of doing things and becoming irritable when a routine is disrupted.

Source: Alzheimer's Association



ABOVE: Dolores "Dodi" Kelley, center, sits in the motor home that her son and daughter-in-law, Ken and Alicia Thompson, bought. The three plan on doing some camping, with Yellowstone National Park being the top destination. BELOW: Ken and Dodi go for a walk around their neighborhood. TRIBUNE PHOTOS/LARRY BECKNER



ABOVE: Ken fills a syringe with insulin for his mother. BELOW: Dodi and her daughter-in-law discuss Dodi's prescription medicine.



# Alzheimer's: No cure

Continued from 1A

hand what is happening to her. At least on a good day.

"Oh, it's a lot of fun," she said, her voice dripping with sarcasm. "You start out thinking there is something wrong with their thinker."

"Then you find out (that it's true), and you have some fun. Ask 'em anything, because they aren't going to remember."

Though Dodi, along with her son and daughter-in-law, Ken and Alicia Thompson, say they use humor to cope, the reality is dim.

Alzheimer's has no survivors. The most common type of dementia, it destroys brain cells, causing memory changes, erratic behavior and the loss of bodily functions. It slowly and painfully takes away people's identity, leaving them unable to connect with others, think, eat, talk or walk.

For those who live to age 85, there is a 43 percent chance they have the disease.

## Keeping her at home

Earlier this month, Dodi had the best dream during an afternoon nap. She dreamt she was in a camper — oh, how she wished that was true since camping is her favorite thing.

A smile spread across her face as Alicia shared that this wasn't a dream. She and Ken purchased a motor home to take Dodi camping this summer. They had given Dodi the tour only hours earlier.

Dodi moved in with the Thompsons in July. Her second husband died a year ago, and Ken and his sister knew Dodi couldn't live alone. After a few months with her daughter, Dodi came to Great Falls from Washington state to live with Ken and Alicia.

In addition to caring for her mother and grandmother, two of Dodi's five children died of Pompe disease, a glycogen storage disease, when they were 1 and 2 years old. She also cared for two husbands who died of cancer.

Dodi's heart is big. "For us, the last thing in the world would be that we would send her to a rest home," Alicia said.

Dodi responded: "I appreciate that, but the time may come that you'll regret that."

Alicia, who is the executive director of the City-County Health Department, works fulltime, while Ken, who had neck surgery earlier this year, cares for his mother.

Alicia helps out in the evenings and says she knows why assisted-living facilities are so expensive. The level of responsibility — making sure Dodi gets the right medication at the right time — is high.

In addition, Dodi forgets in the middle of the night that, since she has diabetes, she can't just eat anything she wants.

"I eat a lot when no one is checking on me," she said.

Nodding her head adamantly, Alicia answered: "Yes, she does."

## Caregivers

The growing number of Alzheimer's patients means an increasing number of unpaid caregivers. There are 46,799 such caregivers in Montana, said the Alzheimer's Association's Belser.

That correlates to 53,294,667 hours of unpaid care, or \$645 million in lost wages annually.

"People try to keep their loved ones at home," Belser said. "They do well

for longer periods of time, plus the cost of institutional care is out of reach for many people."

However, not all families are able to keep Alzheimer's patients at home.

Great Falls' Larry LeMaster, whose wife, Janette, has Alzheimer's, knows this is true.

He put Janette into a Great Falls assisted-living home two years ago, at the urging of his three children. She had to be watched constantly. She slipped away from Larry three times — twice she walked out of their house, and once she walked out of a building downtown. All three times Larry had to call the police to help search for her.

The last time was a cold fall day. She walked out of their Bel-View Palisades house and wasn't found for several hours. A Fox Farm man called police after he found Janette in his driveway, looking very confused. She had been at the house across the street and said she was looking for her daughter's house.

"It was a period of a couple hours. It was scary," Larry said.

Though she has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, there is little else the medical community can do for Janette. There are a few medications that lessen the symptoms and improve daily functioning, but they

work for only about half of the people who take them. Promising research is being conducted, but a lack of funding slows the process. (See Monday's story.)

"They don't know. They don't know anything about Alzheimer's," Larry said.

## Memory care units

With a growing number of dementia patients, there is a need for more facilities.

"Montana has seen a big influx of homes with dementia care units in the past few years," Belser said.

She said that, so far, the state is keeping up with the demand.

"It is definitely a trend in elderly housing to introduce a dementia wing," she added.

In Great Falls, the number of memory care units is growing; the latest was opened earlier this month by Bee Hive Homes. Of Cascade County's 23 assisted-living facilities, nine have a Category C endorsement, which means the facility is licensed to care for those with memory issues. Bee Hive, which now has two memory care units, plans to open another one later this year.

"The capacity that we have here in Great Falls is growing," said Warren Tolkinen, community services program manager and an ombudsman at the Cascade County Aging Services Area VII Agency on Aging.

Growth in memory care units is present across the state. In 2006, there were 185 assisted-living facilities, of which only 13 offered Category C services. Now there are 201 assisted-living facilities in Montana, and 47 offer Category C services.

In year's past, nursing homes and only a few assisted-living facilities were equipped to handle patients with memory issues, Tolkinen said.

Not everyone can afford to pay for the proper care a loved one needs.

"As we know, the care in facilities is hugely expensive. Many (patients) don't have Medicaid, and Medicare reimbursement is minimal," Belser said.

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