

THIS IS ALZHEIMER AWARENESS MONTH

Let's face it! Get the facts. Know for sure

Canadians are still dismissing symptoms of dementia as "just old age" based on survey results released recently by the Alzheimer Society. Close to 50 per cent of

symptoms were part of "old age" and would eventually go away. Another 39 per cent said their symptoms were episodic or didn't take them seriously enough.



Fearfulness or feelings of anxiety are changes in mood and personality that could indicate Alzheimer's disease.

Canadians lived a year or more with their symptoms before seeing a family doctor. Of these, 16 per cent waited more than 2 years. A delayed diagnosis results in a huge treatment gap and prevents people from getting valuable information about medications, support and better disease management.

To promote the benefits of early diagnosis, during Alzheimer Awareness Month in January, the Alzheimer Society is launching its Let's face it! campaign.

The online survey, which was conducted by the Society in the fall of 2011, also revealed that the most common reason people delayed seeing their doctor (53 per cent) was the belief that the

Over a quarter either refused to see a doctor or saw no need to go unless symptoms grew worse. However, three-quarters of respondents – caregivers of people with dementia – admitted that they wished they had sought a diagnosis sooner to have access to treatments to manage symptoms. They also recognized other benefits of getting a diagnosis when shown a list of these. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents said that early diagnosis would help them put their legal and financial affairs in order; 69 per cent said it would keep the person with dementia at home longer, and allow the person to actively participate in decision-making. Sixty-two per cent of respondents attributed better coping and living with the disease to early diagnosis.

"Symptoms of dementia are different from normal aging," says Naguib Gouda, newly appointed CEO at the Alzheimer Society. "We need to help Canadians recognize the symptoms for what they are: signs of a brain disorder that will affect 1.1 million Canadians in the next 25 years. While we don't yet have a cure, we can offer treatment that may slow the progression of the disease, and a wealth of information to help people prepare for their future needs."

The 10 warning signs of Alzheimer's disease

1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life.

Memory loss is one of the most common signs of Alzheimer's. This is especially so if men and women forget things that happened very recently, which can negatively impact their daily lives. Additional signs include forgetting important dates and events; asking for the same information over and over again; or relying on memory aides such as reminder notes or even family members for things individuals could once remember on their own.

2. Difficulty planning.

Some people might start to exhibit difficulty following a plan or working with numbers, be it following a recipe or paying the monthly bills. Concentration is often difficult for those exhibiting symptoms of Alzheimer's.

3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks.

Daily tasks such as driving to work or remembering the rules of a familiar game will prove difficult for people with Alzheimer's.

4. Disorientation with regards to time and/or place.

Nearly everyone has had momentary lapses where they forget what time it is or what day it is. But such lapses are not momentary for people with Alzheimer's, who might even get lost on their own street and not remember how to get home.

5. Trouble understanding images and spatial relationships.

Some people with Alzheimer's have difficulty reading, judging distance or determining color or contrast. For example, a person with Alzheimer's might walk past a mirror and not realize he or she is the person in the

mirror.

6. New problems with words in speaking or writing.

People with Alzheimer's might experience trouble holding or joining a conversation. An example is stopping in the middle of a conversation and having no idea how to continue. They might also struggle with vocabulary, often having trouble finding the right word to express what they're thinking.

7. Misplacing things.

People with Alzheimer's might put things in unusual places and then experience difficulty retracing their steps to find those items. This tends to occur more frequently over time, and they often accuse others of stealing items they simply can't find.

8. Decreased or poor judgement.

Poor judgement, such as not visiting the doctor or mishandling finances, is another warning sign for Alzheimer's. These poor decisions can extend to personal grooming, which men and women with Alzheimer's might neglect.

9. Withdrawal from society.

Men and women with Alzheimer's might start to withdraw from society, removing themselves from social activities, projects at work or hobbies. Avid sports fans might no longer be able to follow their favorite team, while social butterflies might grow reclusive.

10. Changes in mood and personality.

People with Alzheimer's might experience mood swings for no apparent reason and can become anxious, confused, depressed, fearful, or suspicious. Acting out of character might also be indicative of Alzheimer's.

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