

Tests For Alzheimer's What Science Knows Now

There are more than 5 million people in the United States today who have Alzheimer's disease. In the over-65 population, 1 in 8 people has the disease. For those over 85, roughly 50% have Alzheimer's or some degree of dementia. And it's estimated that 500,000 Americans under the age of 65 have already been diagnosed with Alzheimer's

Imagine what will happen to these numbers when more than 72 million American baby boomers enter the senior population. But how is Alzheimer's disease diagnosed?

Unfortunately, there are no actual tests for Alzheimer's. It's only diagnosed by the process of elimination. What science knows now is that there are a number of medical issues that can cause memory-related problems. These include thyroid disorders, small strokes, drug interaction, depression, and pernicious anemia. Science also knows that the earlier the diagnosis, the better chance for developing an appropriate treatment plan.

The diagnostic procedure begins with your health practitioner evaluating your medical history, as well as that of your parents, siblings and grandparents. Other possible causes of memory impairment are then ruled out. A physical examination and blood tests will help eliminate these possibilities.

A cognitive test may also be administered, in which the patient is asked to perform simple memory and processing tasks. The patient may then be referred for more complex medical screenings. Several types of brain imaging tests, such as CAT scans, MRIs and PET scans, are used to rule out strokes or tumors.

Dementia can be caused by a series of strokes so small as to be undetected. Depression can also cause memory lapses. Parkinson's disease, a degenerative nerve disorder, can also be a cause of dementia. And some medications, especially in older patients, can cause fuzzy thinking and memory loss. Even a fever or a head injury can result in memory problems, as can dehydration or malnutrition. Late-stage syphilis is yet another cause of dementia.

Blood tests can help eliminate these and other possible causes of memory loss, such as thyroid disorders or vitamin deficiencies.

More extensive neuropsychological testing may be given to the patient. These tests assess the patient's memory, problem-solving abilities, attention span and skills involving numbers and language. Psychological tests can also be useful in diagnosing Alzheimer's disease.

A vaccine was developed that reduces the deposits in the brain associated with Alzheimer's. However, it was found to have dangerous side effects, and the clinical trial was abandoned.

Genetic testing for Alzheimer's is still in the beginning phase. Researchers have identified several genes that are associated with Alzheimer's disease. It must be mentioned here that recent studies have shown that only 30% of cognitive decline is the result of genetics. The remaining 70% is the result of lifestyle choices.

What science knows now is that Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of the human aging process. There is always a cause. Although physicians have no definitive tests for Alzheimer's, you should not ignore any early symptoms of mental decline.

There are many other tests and screenings that can be used to eliminate possible causes of memory loss. And fortunately, there are drug therapies that can slow down the progression of this frightening disease.

About the Author

Now I would like to invite you to visit the non-profit [Alzheimer's Research and Prevention Foundation](http://www.alzheimersprevention.org) website at www.alzheimersprevention.org to discover even more strategies on how you can improve memory loss and prevent [Alzheimer's disease](#). [Testing for Alzheimer's](#)

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