



# What is Alzheimer's Disease?

By Dr. Linda Hancock

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

## Published

November 24th, 2008

Two of my grandparents and my father-in-law had Alzheimer's Disease. Although I was not the primary caregiver for any of them, I found it sad and frustrating to watch them change from the people I knew and loved to people whose personalities and memories disappeared over time.

Alzheimer's Disease was named after a German physician, Dr. Alois Alzheimer, who first spoke at a scientific meeting in 1906 about a patient who had symptoms that he had not previously observed in others. His 51 year old female patient had problems with her memory, unfounded suspicions that her husband was unfaithful and difficulties with speaking and understanding. These symptoms rapidly grew worse. Her physical health also deteriorated and she died.

Alzheimer's disease, which is the most common form of dementia, is a degenerative condition that affects the neurological health of the person. Memory problems are usually one of the first identified symptoms in this progressive condition which moves from one stage to another in severity. There is no recovery. Treatment is limited to providing medications that slow progression and ensuring that an appropriate environment is set up to keep the patient safe.

Every 71 seconds, a person is diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease and the Alzheimer's Society claims that an estimated 450,000 Canadians over 65 years have this or a related disease. Also, in 2008 an estimated 97,000 Canadians will develop Alzheimer's or a related disease.

This illness is devastating and one of the most emotionally draining conditions for individuals and family members who often become their caregivers. Because of this, many individuals benefit from problem-solving and protecting their own health by partnering with a psychologist.

If you are concerned that you, a family member or friend is experiencing symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease there are several important things that you can do:

1. Consult your physician and ask to have an assessment done
2. Contact the Alzheimer's Society in your area to learn about resources that are available
3. Begin planning for the future so that the person involved can help with decision-making regarding finances, residency and other personal desires
4. Seek support for family members who will be affected by the traumatic process of watching their loved-one change

Remember: You do not need to deal with this situation by yourself. There are many resources in the community who will help to form a team to support you and your family