

HEALTH

Knowing If It's Alzheimer's Or Just Typical Age-Related Changes

NewsUSA

(NU) - Maybe your mom forgot where she parked her car. Or maybe you had to resort to describing “the thing that gets the creases out of clothes” to a salesperson because you couldn’t remember the word “iron.”

In either case, part of you may have been worried it could be ... Alzheimer's disease. With good reason.

Every 65 seconds, someone in the U.S. joins the more than 5 million Americans now living with this fatal brain disease, which slowly destroys memory and thinking skills before ultimately making even a simple thing like swallowing impossible. And with no current cure, it's no wonder a recent poll found that no other life-threatening condition - not cancer, not strokes - instills more fear among those 65 and older.

“One in three seniors dies with Alzheimer’s or another dementia,” says a spokesperson for the association. “But it isn’t just a disease of old age. Approximately 200,000 Americans under age 65 have younger-onset Alzheimer’s disease.”

To help raise awareness and critical funds for care, support and research, the Alzheimer’s Association Walk to End Alzheimer’s will be held through November in more than 600 communities nationwide. It’s the largest event of its kind, and the financial services firm Edward Jones has committed to raising \$12 million over five years as its national presenting sponsor.

“This is about empathy,” says the firm’s Ken Cella. “And not just for the estimated 150,000 Edward Jones clients suffering from Alzheimer’s, or another dementia, and those upending their lives to care for them.”

Given all the understandable fear surrounding the disease, it’s important to distinguish between what may be early symptoms of Alzheimer’s or another dementia and the typical age-related changes most everyone experiences now and then:

• **Memory loss that disrupts daily life.** One of the most common signs, especially in the early stage, is forgetting recently learned information. (A typical age-related change: Sometimes forgetting appointments or names, but remem-



bering them later.)

• **Difficulty completing familiar tasks.** They may have trouble driving to a familiar location or remembering the rules of a favorite game. (A typical age-related change: Occasionally needing help recording a TV show.)

• **Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.** Vision problems can be a symptom for some. That may lead to difficulty with balance or trouble reading, and they may also have problems judging distance and determining color or contrast that cause issues with driving. (A typical age-related change: Vision changes related to cataracts.)

• **Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps.** They may put things in unusual places - and even accuse others of stealing, especially as the disease progresses. (A typical age-related change: Occasionally misplacing things and retracing steps to find them.)

• **Withdrawal from work or social activities.** They may experience changes in the ability to hold or follow a conversation, which can cause them to withdraw from hobbies, social activities or other engagements. (A typical age-related change: Sometimes feeling uninterested in family or social obligations.)

• **Changes in mood and personality.** They can become confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful or anxious. They may also be easily upset at home, with friends, or when out of their comfort zone. (A typical age-related change: Developing very specific ways of doing things and becoming irritable when a routine is disrupted.)

If you notice one or more signs, the Alzheimer’s Association advises consulting a doctor. For more info, visit alz.org/10signs.