

Dementia and Alzheimer's

Wanda Norris spoke at the Treynor Optimist Club on Saturday, November 26 about Alzheimer's disease.

She has been teaching Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) classes for continuing health education since 2003. She has worked in long term care since 1991.

Wanda described four types of dementia:

- Senile – age related
- Disease related, from Parkinson's, AIDS, drinking, etc.
- Multi-infarct – little strokes
- Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's disease was first diagnosed in 1906. In 1976 it was determined to be the most common type of dementia. In 1993 a gene was discovered that is related to early-onset Alzheimer's. In 2010 it was the 6th leading cause of death.

Alzheimer's disease affects 1 in 10 people over 65. It can cause death 8-10 years after onset. Typically people will die from something else. More information is available at www.AboutAlz.org.

Early symptoms of Alzheimer's include:

- Being confused in familiar places
- Trouble handling money and paying bills
- Taking longer than normal to complete daily tasks
- Occasionally losing or misplacing things
- Mild mood and personality changes

Later symptoms include:

- Increased memory loss and confusion
- Problems recognizing family and friends
- Continuously repeating stories, words, or motions
- Difficulty completing tasks with multiple steps
- Lack of concern for hygiene and appearance

Advanced symptoms include:

- Inability to recognize family or themselves
- Inability to communicate
- Lack of control of bowel and bladder
- Groaning, moaning, and grunting
- Requires assistance for all activities of living

Medications can help for about 50% of people. They are usually only effective for 8-12 months. They are not a cure and need to be started early in the disease. Medicines will only treat symptoms; they cannot reverse damage.

Alzheimer's patients want to be treated as adults. They do not want to be treated or talked to as children, even when they have lost many of their capabilities.

A cognitive function test is available at: <http://cft.foodforthebrain.org/consent.aspx>. This test may indicate if you have a mild cognitive impairment and steps you can take to reduce your risk of getting worse.