

Spiritual Care of the Person with Dementia

Book preorders: <https://www.churchpublishing.org/redeemingdementia>

Janice Hicks thanks the Episcopal Evangelism Society for a grant for this research

Prayer for the Grace to Age Well

When the signs of age begin to mark my body
(and still more when they touch my mind);
when the ill that is to diminish me or carry me off
strikes from without or is born within me;
when the painful moment comes
in which I suddenly awaken
to the fact that I am ill or growing old;
and above all at that last moment
when I feel I am losing hold of myself
and am absolutely passive within the hands
of the great unknown forces that have formed me;
in all those dark moments, O God,
grant that I may understand that it is you
(provided only my faith is strong enough)
who are painfully parting the fibres of my being
in order to penetrate to the very marrow
of my substance and bear me away within yourself.

- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ
Hearts on Fire, Praying with Jesuits



Many illnesses cause dementia –

Dementia:

(2 or more of the following)

Forgetfulness, Memory Loss, Confusion,
Poor reasoning and logic, Personality changes,
Poor judgment, Ability to focus, Visual perception

Alzheimer's
Creutzfeldt – Jacob's
Frontotemporal
Huntington's
Hydrocephalus
Lewy Body Disease
Mixed
Parkinson's
Vascular
Wernicke-Korsakoff

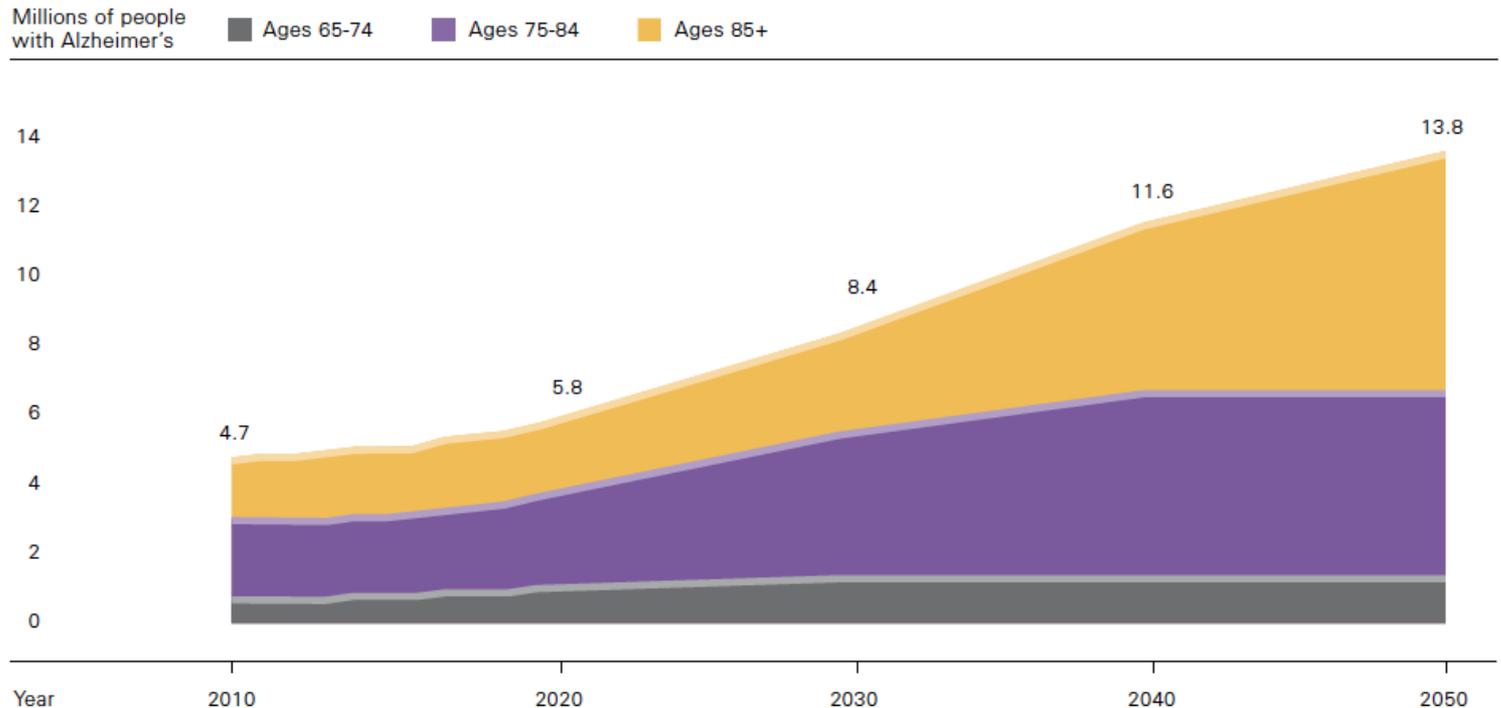
Depression
Diabetes
Excess use of alcohol
Head Injury
Medications
Mild Cognitive Impairment
Thyroid
Tumor
Vitamin deficiency
Many more....

Alzheimer's Disease
accounts for about
60-80% of dementia.

1 in 9

Older Americans has Alzheimer's Disease

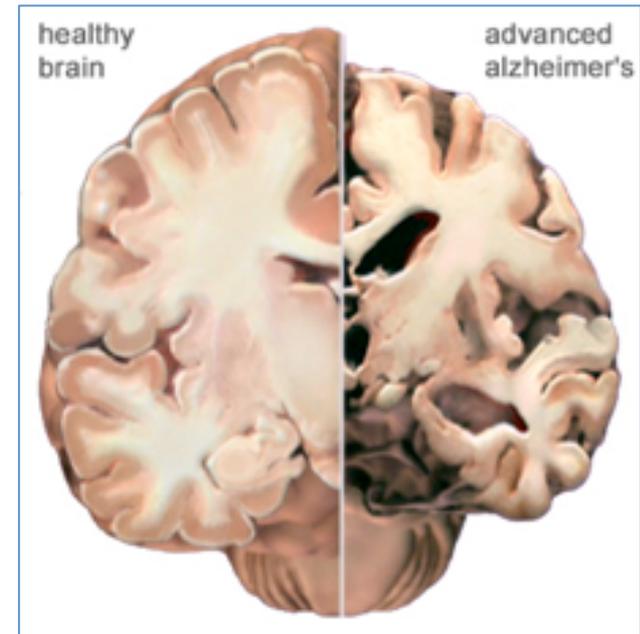
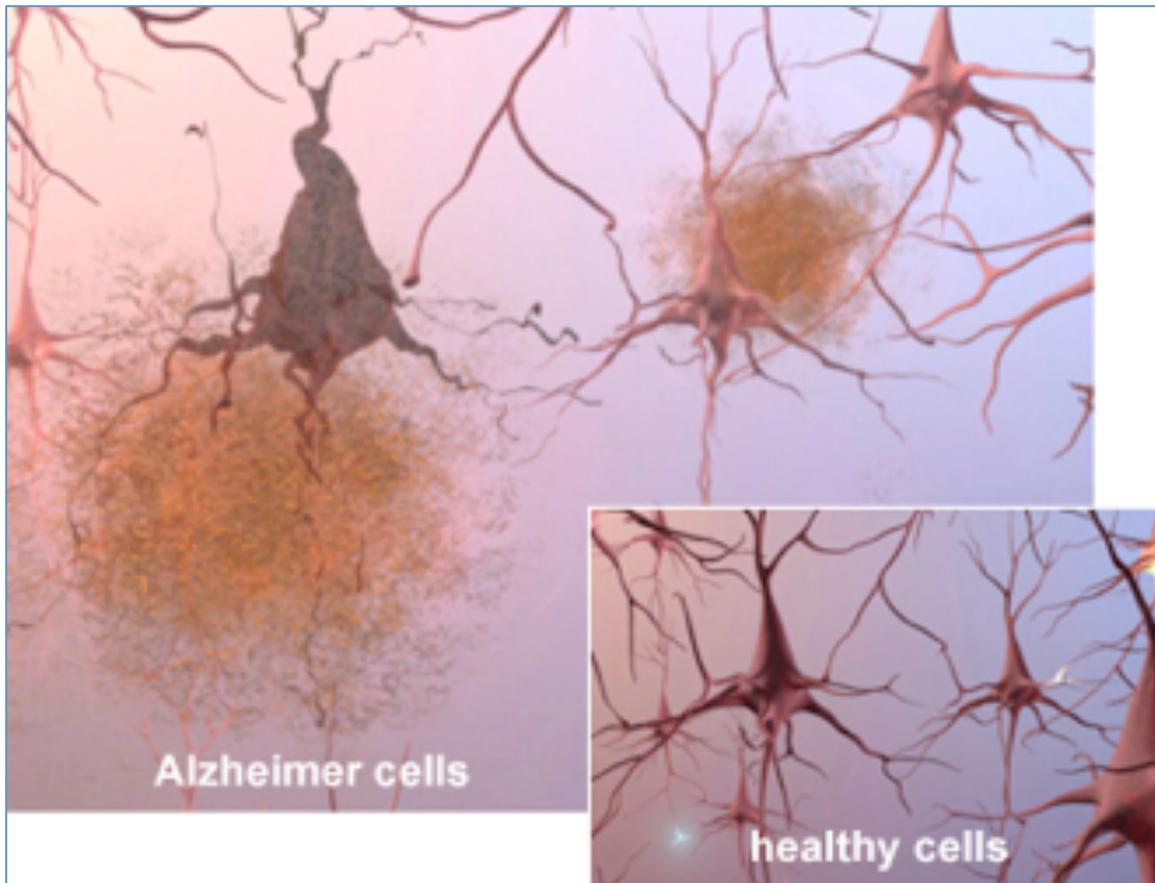
Projected number of people age 65 and older with Alzheimer's Disease 2010 to 2050 (U.S.)



Graphic from Alzheimer's Association

It is related to aging but it is NOT normal aging! It is an illness – see a specialist!

Alzheimer's Disease – occurrence of plaques and tangles in and around neurons (no one knows the cause)



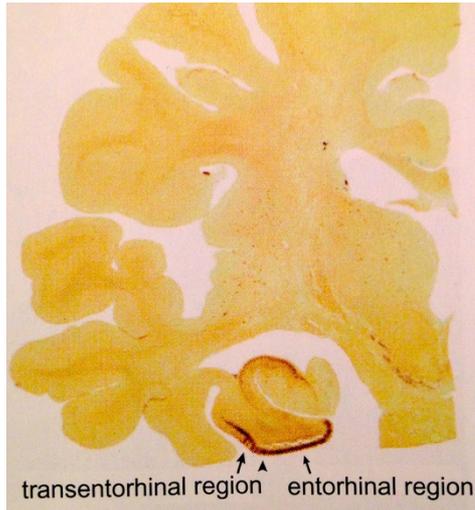
Plaque – beta-amyloid protein outside cells
Tangles – tau protein inside cells

Why the stigma?

- Dementia results from a brain disease. We don't stigmatize, say, diseases of other organs.
- We live in a culture that prizes rationality, productivity and independence, and we lose status if we don't conform. BUT:
- Our culture could learn that these are not the most important things!
- God "re-members" us
- We retain our families and community
- Abilities and capacities remain – not all is lost
- Emotional sensitivity and spiritual awareness possible
- People are LIVING WITH dementia for a long time

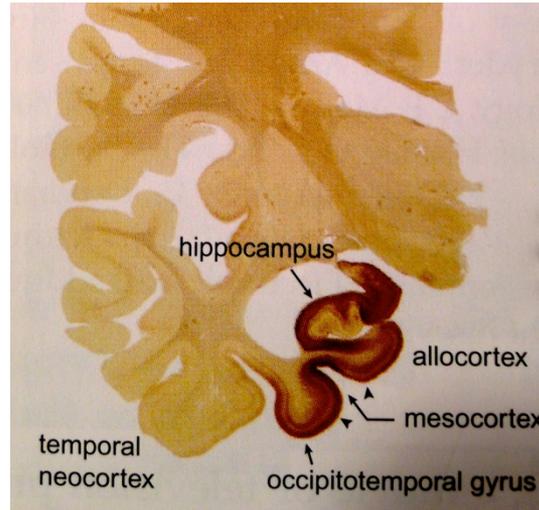


Understanding the Stages of Alzheimer's



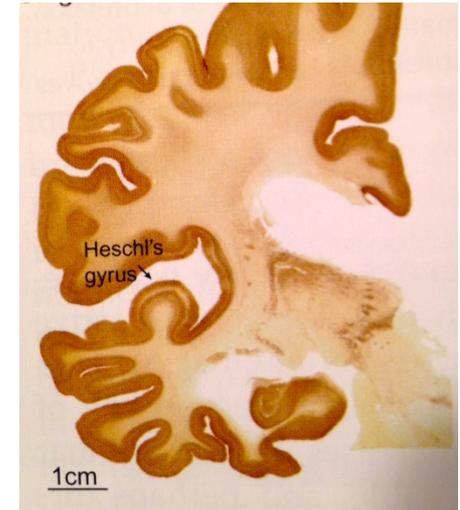
Early stage

Loss of short-term memory
Difficulty executing tasks:
 e.g. checkbook, phone
Repetition and confusion
Wanting to “go home”
Wandering, sundowning
Person likely in distress about
the illness – anger, fear, etc.



Middle stage

Use of long-term memory - may
think they are in their childhood
Difficulty with speech
Difficulty with travel, walking,
 continence
More impulsive
As person forgets, it can become
easier on them...



Late stage

Pronounced decline in cognition
Lots of sleeping/eyes closed
Inability to communicate
Needs assistance with all tasks
Prone to infections, pneumonia
When brain stem affected, life not
possible
The death can be painless & peaceful

80% of Alzheimer's patients are at home.

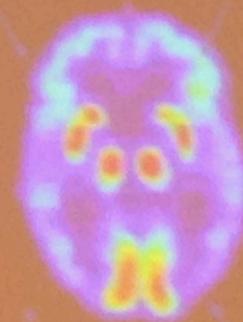
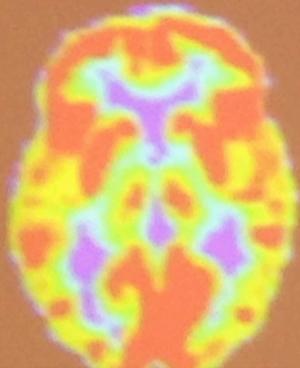
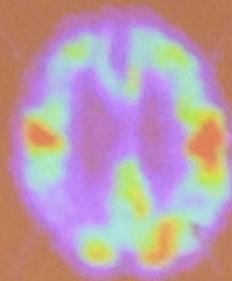
Positron Emission Tomography (PET) Alzheimer's Disease Progression vs. Normal Brains

Normal

Early
Alzheimer's

Late
Alzheimer's

Child



Why Spiritual Care



- The person's relationship with God ALWAYS REMAINS Nothing – no illness, hardship, distress - can separate us from God. (Rom 8:31-39)
God seeks us more than we seek God. (K. Barth)
- Fulfill the mission of the Church until the end of life – be a reminder of God's love and of the Church's love
- Not to fix, but to be with, be present, to say God is here, "Come and see" (John 1:39)
- "Yes, I can learn something of God here, deep things about God."

Early stage – Spiritual Care

- Person still recognizes and enjoys family, friends and church; traditions, dinners out, great time for family reunion
- Lessening of inhibitions, some “blossom”
- Person can still do quite a lot (avoid doing for)
- Find out what brings them hope, purpose, what makes them feel close to God?
- What religious practices and symbols are important to the person (prayer, nature, meditation, music, icons, candles, church – make dementia friendly)
- Assure them that they will not be alone



Kathy Fogg Berry
When Words Fail (DVD)
watch clip: Early Stage Dementia



Middle Stage – Spiritual Care

- Sometimes recognizes loved ones
- Enjoys reminiscing with old photos, memorabilia
- Appeal to senses (bring objects like seashells)
- Enjoys food (maybe finger food), socializing
- Enjoys singing, reciting scripture
- Find ways to minister without words
- Assure them of God's presence and the Church's love for them
- They may not remember you visited but will feel the good feeling for a long time



Kathy Fogg Berry
When Words Fail DVD
Watch Clip: Middle Stage Dementia



Late Stage – Spiritual Care

- Love, touch, music, spirituality – we don't know...
- Value the person!
- Roll with how she sounds, reflect her mood and tone
- Be fully present; synch your breath with her breath
- Spend time thanking God for this person
- Occasional coherent sentences “I’m still the same”
“Don’t go away”
- For people of faith, have ready familiar hymns, prayers, scriptures and sacraments
- “And the things of Earth will grow strangely dim...”



Watch clip: Naomi Feil and Gladys

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrZXz10FcVM>

Kathy Fogg Berry
When Words Fail DVD
watch clip: Late Stage Dementia



WESTMINSTER
CANTERBURY
RICHMOND



Shining Reminders of True Love

Caregivers need spiritual support too:

Loretta Woodward Veney

Being My Mom's Mom

watch clip:

http://www.lorettaveney.com/Being_My_Mom_s_Mom.php



"Love is all that remains. Love and life are finally the same thing, and you know that for yourself once you have walked through death. Love has you. Love is you. Love alone, and your deep need for love, recognizes love everywhere else. Remember that you already are what you are seeking. As Paul states, any fear "that your lack of fidelity could cancel God's fidelity, is absurd" (Romans 3:3-4). Love can finally overcome fear, and your house will be rebuilt on a new and solid foundation. This foundation was always there, but it takes a long time to find that "It is love alone that lasts" (1 Corinthians 13:13). All you have loved in your life and been loved by are eternal and true."

Richard Rohr