

Alzheimer's

Dementia affects 47 million people worldwide, which is something the Alzheimer's Association hopes to make everyone aware of this month.

June is Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month, which is a chance to hold a global conversation about the brain, Alzheimer's disease and other dementia. As a way to show support, those who are concerned are asked to wear purple throughout the month, and especially on June 21, when the Alzheimer's Association will hold its "Longest Day" event from sunrise to sunset.

Each one of us is at risk to develop Alzheimer's, which is the only leading cause of death that can't be prevented, cured or even slowed.

"You can't really treat Alzheimer's," said Katie Clark, a Family Nurse Practitioner at Lawrence County Memorial Hospital's Primary Care Clinic. "All you can do is keep it from getting worse. The best you can do is get them on medication to keep things from progressing."

Clark says that just addressing the subject of Alzheimer's with a loved one can be touchy.

"The biggest thing is for people to know the warning signs, such as when someone is starting to become forgetful, and having the courage to speak up about it," she said. "But you want to speak up without accusing or blaming the person. It's a very sensitive subject. A lot of times, these people can sense they're forgetting things and they just don't know why."

Seniors receive an annual "wellness visit" through Medicare, according to Clark, at which time "mini-mental" examinations take place. This, says Clark, is a good way for providers to keep tabs on someone who may be experiencing the onset of the disease. She emphasizes that family members should make sure their loved ones undergo the visit.

"It's a time when we do a lot of screening tests," she said. "The main reason we do the mini-mental status exams then is because it's not like it's a direct attack on them. We're not telling them, 'You're forgetting things so I'm going to go ahead and test your mental status.' It doesn't feel like that, because it's being done routinely."

Like with a lot of other diseases, Alzheimer's is "progressive," according to Clark. As with other diseases, it's best for the patient if it's discovered early. Family history, she adds, is a "big factor" with the disease.

Additionally, Clark says, caregivers for Alzheimer's patients need to be recognized.

"We need to help those caregivers out all we can," she said. "They're going through a whole lot when they have an Alzheimer's patient to take care of."

Alzheimer's facts

- In the United States, 5.8 million people are living with Alzheimer's disease.
 - Alzheimer's is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States.
 - More than 16 million Americans provide unpaid care for people with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia.
 - Caregivers provided an estimated 18.5 billion hours of care valued at nearly \$234 billion in 2018.
 - Between 2000 and 2017 deaths from heart disease have decreased by nine percent, while deaths from Alzheimer's have increased by 145 percent.
- One in three seniors dies with Alzheimer's or another dementia, which means it kills more than breast cancer and prostate cancer combined.
- Every 65 seconds someone in the United States develops Alzheimer's or another dementia.
 - Only 16 percent of seniors receive regular cognitive assessments during routine health check-ups.

- In 2019, Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia will cost the United States \$290 billion. By 2050 those costs could rise to \$1.1 trillion annually.
- Almost two thirds of Americans with Alzheimer's are women.