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Alzheimer's Disease Factsheet

With 500,000 people in the UK affected, Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia. Iris Murdoch, the famous twentieth century author, was a sufferer. It is a disease which most commonly affects the elderly, but younger people can also be afflicted.

First identified by German neurologist Alois Alzheimer, Alzheimer's is a physical disease which leads to the death of brain cells. Sufferers develop 'plaques' and 'tangles' in the structure of the brain, and have a shortage of essential chemicals which are necessary in the transmission of messages within the brain.

Since it is progressive, the symptoms of Alzheimer's only worsen over time as more areas of the brain are impaired. Early signs include lapses of memory, confusion, mood swings and withdrawal. Eventually those who are afflicted will be unable to recognize much of their environment and perform the everyday activities which most of us take for granted. It is important to remember however that everyone suffers in their own individual way, and time taken for progression of the disease is different for everyone.

There is no cure for Alzheimer's and nobody knows exactly what causes it. There is evidence that there may be a genetic link, however in the vast majority of cases, the effect of inheritance appears to be small. The risk of developing the disease does increase over time though, with one in twenty people affected by dementia over the age of 65 and one in five over the age of 80.

People with Alzheimer's need a lot of care and attention. In the final stages of the disease this can become a 24 hour job. Research into medication and cures also requires continued support.

If you would like more information on Alzheimer's then you can contact any of the charities listed below and can volunteer for them also.

How to Get Involved

There are many ways that you can volunteer in your area. All you need to do is get in touch with an organisation that can help. If you want to volunteer, your first point of call could be a national volunteering organisation who can talk through the kinds of opportunities that are available to you in your area which suit your needs, expertise or hobbies.

Before making contact with an organisation, think about what you want to know from them, and what they are likely to ask you. How much time can you give? At what time of day? What do you want to get from volunteering, e.g. meeting people or gaining new skills? What skills or experience can you offer? Then to volunteer for an Alzheimer's charity get in touch with one of the charities listed below.

Alzheimer's Research Trust

As well as funding vital research, The Alzheimer's Research Trust provides information on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, and the drugs currently available in the UK.

Address

The Stables, Station Road, Great Shelford, Cambridge CB22 5LR

tel: 01223 843899

www: www.alzheimers-research.org.uk

email: enquiries@alzheimers-research.org.uk

Alzheimer's Society

The Alzheimer's Society is one of the UK's leading care and research charity for people with dementia, their families and carers.

Address

Devon House, 58 St Katharine's Way, London E1W 1JX

tel: 020 7423 3500

web: www.alzheimers.org.uk

email: enquiries@alzheimers.org.uk

For Dementia (formerly Dementia Relief Trust)

The mission of For Dementia is to improve the quality of life for people affected by dementia.

Address

6 Camden High Street, London NW1 0JH

tel: 020 7874 7210

web: www.fordementia.org.uk

email: info@fordementia.org.uk

Alzheimer's Disease International

Alzheimer's Disease International is the umbrella organisation of Alzheimer associations around the world, which offer support and information to people with dementia and their carers.

Address

64 Great Suffolk Street, London, SE1 0BL

tel: 020 7981 0880

web: www.alz.co.uk

email: info@alz.co.uk

Community Channel

Address: Community Channel, 2nd Floor, Riverwalk House, 157-161 Millbank, London, SW1P 4RR

Email: feedback@communitychannel.org

Website: www.communitychannel.org

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