

## De-Mystifying Dementia: Memory Care Tips from Gerontology's Best Practices

by Dr. Alan Dengiz, Assistant Clinical Professor, University of Michigan and Medical Director, Glacier Hills campus; and Gerie Greenspan, Associate Director of Development, Glacier Hills Foundation



Simple forgetfulness is a natural sign of the aging process. But, spouses, family or other caregivers can miss subtle distinctions between what was once known as senility and Alzheimer's disease, or other forms of dementia that are equally serious. Glacier Hills presented a program April 27 by Dr. Alan Dengiz, entitled **De-mystifying Dementia & Memory Loss**, (Click link to see video - [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#), [Part 5](#), [Part 6](#)) for residents of its life care community concerned about daunting statistics, best practices and successful living strategies for memory care.

General decline in function may indicate presence of dementia, like difficulty balancing a checkbook or following familiar instructions. However, it's not necessarily Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's appears to be related to the buildup of toxic proteins in normal brains because of genetic defects in protein production, trauma, or the inability to efficiently remove them from the brain. Other dementias, may be caused by vascular disease, Parkinson's, Lewy body disease and many other more rare disorders. So, for seniors who frequently can't find the right word, become lost in familiar territory, slip into personality changes or notice serious lapses in short-term memory--these symptoms may indicate something else going on and merit investigation by a qualified geriatrician, internist, family physician, neurologist or psychiatrist.

Though Dr. Alois Alzheimer (German psychiatrist and neuropathologist) first described the disease in 1907, Alzheimer's has always been with us, but previously was referred to as *senility* or *hardening of the arteries*. It is the most common form of all dementias and affects 2% of the population between the age of 65 and 75, increasing with age until it occurs in nearly 50% of those over the age of 85. As research brings us closer to effective treatments, our recent discussion and Q&A, GH web/written], offers older adults and caregivers a **simple list** of life enrichment strategies. These memory care tips, one for each day of the week, may give patients and caregivers an edge to sustain memory health and independence as Americans live longer and develop symptoms.

1. **Don't panic** about a decline in information retention. This is natural to a degree, though there are genetic links that indicate predisposition for memory loss. Focus on concentration and use of memory aids like word association.

2. **Identify a potential curable cause through an evaluation.** Your healthcare professional may uncover hidden contributors, like nutritional/vitamin imbalances (i.e., B12), anemia or thyroid disease; metabolic disorders; medication interactions; depression; alcoholism; or infections and inflammation in the brain, strokes or tumors.
3. **Nutrition: Consider Vitamin D supplements and eating natural foods high in Vitamin E** (whole grains, nuts) daily. Nature's blue, red and dark green fruits and vegetables are beneficial, as are spices (curry, cumin, turmeric). Also, **increase Omega 3 fats** in the diet (fish or fish oil capsules 2-3 times wkly, soybeans, nuts, or flax seed oil).
4. **Exercise mind and body.** Physical exercise **45 minutes, four times wkly**, or break into shorter increments indoors or outside when weather is favorable. Recumbent or seated exercise counts! The brain must be challenged, as well by **learning something new**, practicing self-care routines with the opposite hand or backwards, or doing puzzles or Sudoku. And, don't forget plenty of **creativity**, like **writing, music, theater or art**.
5. **Protect head and body** from injury. Practice safety, using seat belts and helmets to decrease accidental concussion or other injuries that increase risk for Alzheimer's in the future.
6. **Maximize blood flow to the brain.** Actively monitor/control levels of cholesterol, blood pressure, diabetes, estrogen (only briefly after menopause and before age 65).
7. **Get enough rest and enjoy an active social life.** **Activity** enhances mental connections in the brain, keeping you sharper. Being engaged with others will stimulate memories.

The presentation by Dr. Dengiz interprets the latest research and new data from the Alzheimer's Association's [2011 report](#) for a capacity audience of novice and retired healthcare professionals. Issues he addressed included testing innovations, medications that treat symptoms (*Aricept, Exelon, Razadyne, Namenda*), and promising new approaches (pending future FDA approval) that may potentially result in earlier studies among those persons at highest-risk for Alzheimer's disease within five years.

Today, as in ages past, the oldest humans who live 100 or more years rarely develop Alzheimer's. Average life expectancy has increased to 78 years—an impressive increase in the century since it was first identified! A healthy lifestyle paired with quality healthcare and a research-based life enrichment program is the best defense for older adults concerned about memory loss.

---

[Glacier Hills](#) Senior Living Community is creating a unique [Life Enrichment Center](#) for Memory Care Excellence for Ann Arbor (opening 2013), in addition to its \$26.5 M renovation project well underway. It values its collaborative relationships with Michigan's universities and community colleges that assure continual service enhancements, overall excellence of care, and high levels of satisfaction among residents.