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Alzheimer's Disease: Symptoms, Pathophysiology, Risks, and Treatments – A Concise Overview

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ABSTRACT

Over 15 million individuals worldwide suffer from Alzheimer's disease, which is the most frequent cause of dementia, while sporadic variations are more common. With prodromal and preclinical periods lasting many years and an average clinical course of eight to ten years, the disease is a chronic illness. In the population over 65, it is predicted to have a prevalence of 10–30% and an incidence of 1-3 percent. The majority of patients have the sporadic variant, which is typified by a delayed onset and an inability to remove the amyloid-β peptide from the interstitial spaces in the brain. It is now feasible to use PET and cerebrospinal fluid biomarkers to detect Aβ buildup. A number of licensed medications help with various symptoms, but there are currently no treatments that can change the fundamental causes of the disease. Improved clinical diagnostic guidelines and better approaches to treating behavioral issues and cognitive disturbances are recent breakthroughs. It is debatable and requires more research to determine the function of antioxidants, anti-inflammatory drugs, and estrogen replacement.

INTRODUCTION

The primary cause of dementia and one of the biggest issues facing healthcare in the twenty-first century is Alzheimer's disease.

The G8 declared in December 2013 that dementia should be prioritized internationally and that they hoped to have a treatment or disease-modifying medication accessible by 2025. Since the identification of tau and amyloid β (Aβ), the primary constituents of tangles and plaques, respectively, research has yielded extensive insights into molecular pathogenetic events; yet, the etiology of Alzheimer's disease remains largely unknown, and no effective treatment is now available. Furthermore, a number of factors are connected to individuals who develop symptoms at ages older than 65, even if the presence of Alzheimer's pathology alterations is a prerequisite for diagnosis and sufficient to generate symptoms in some patients with the development of contemporary methods for imaging and quantifying brain functions, analyzing large data sets (including genetic and genomic data), and collaborate with governments worldwide.

There is optimism that the rate of scientific advancement will accelerate as dementia becomes a more prominent priority globally and is included in national healthcare agendas. In this seminar, we will discuss new and exciting discoveries in the quickly developing field of Alzheimer's research that appear to offer a look into the possibility of a future in which Alzheimer's disease may be prevented or, more likely still, cured. We go over the disease's clinical background as well as recent advancements in pathophysiology, molecular genetics, epidemiology, fluorescent and imaging biomarkers, and therapy.

CLINICAL SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Alzheimer's disease is a neurological illness that worsens over time, gradually destroying brain cells. A reduction in cognitive abilities, such as memory, thought, and behavior, results from this. Depending on the disease's stage, the clinical indicators and symptoms of Alzheimer's can change, but some of the more prevalent ones are as follows:

EARLY PHASE SYMPTOMS

Memory loss: The earliest and most obvious sign of Alzheimer's disease is frequent memory loss. It's common for people with early-stage Alzheimer's to forget appointments, recent talks, or occurrences. They might also struggle to recall names or instructions.

Planning and problem-solving difficulties: Individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease may experience difficulties organizing their lives and completing intricate tasks, including managing a checkbook or following a recipe.

Bad judgment: Individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease may make bad choices, such as wasting money they don't have or driving when they shouldn't.

Alzheimer's patients may experience personality changes, such as withdrawal, irritability, or suspicion.

Increased severity of memory loss: As the illness worsens, memory loss gets worse. Individuals suffering from mid-stage Alzheimer's disease could lose track of personal details like their address or phone number. They might also have trouble identifying known individuals.

Alzheimer's patients may have confusion regarding their environment, the time of day, or even their identity.

Language issues: Individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease may have trouble pronouncing words correctly or keeping up with a discussion.

Behavior issues: Alzheimer's patients may wander, act irrationally, or experience hallucinations.

Severe memory loss: Individuals suffering from advanced Alzheimer's disease may become completely unaware of their loved ones and their surroundings. They might not be able to take care of themselves or communicate.

Total reliance on others: Individuals with late-stage Alzheimer's disease need total assistance from others to meet all of their daily demands.

PATHOPHYSIOLOGY

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a neurodegenerative condition that causes the brain's neurons and synapses to gradually disappear. AD's two primary characteristics are:

Amyloid plaques are extracellular deposits of beta-amyloid (Aβ) protein that build up in the spaces between nerve cells.

Intracellular aggregates of the tau protein that develop inside nerve cells are known as neurofibrillary tangles.

Although the precise origin of AD is still unknown, a complex interaction between genetic and environmental variables is thought to be responsible. According to what is now known about the pathophysiology of AD, a series of events include:

Amyloid cascade:

Aβ is a typical result of the amyloid precursor protein (APP), a bigger protein, breaking down.

When Aβ is not adequately removed from the brain, it builds up and forms plaques in AD.

It is believed that the buildup of Aβ causes a toxic cascade that damages and eventually destroys nerve cells.

Tauopathy:

Tau is a protein that often aids in the stabilization of microtubules, which are necessary for the movement of materials and nutrients across nerve cells.

Tau undergoes aberrant modification in AD and gathers to create tangles inside nerve cells.

These tangles cause microtubules to malfunction normally and lead to the degeneration of nerve cells.

Inflammation of the brain:

It is believed that tau and Aβ buildup cause long-term inflammation in the brain.

This inflammation impairs brain function and causes more harm to nerve cells.

Loss of synapses:

Synapses—the connections between nerve cells—disappear as a result of nerve cell death and impaired communication.

The progressive loss of synapses causes the cognitive deterioration that is specific to Alzheimer's disease.

It is crucial to remember that this is only a condensed summary of the intricate pathophysiology of AD. There are probably a ton of other variables at play, and each individual's experience may differ in the precise order of occurrences.

RISK FACTORS

Alzheimer's disease develops over a long preclinical period of several decades, raising questions about the extent to which risk factors assessed in late life or shortly before the onset of clinical symptoms are a result of developing pathological changes rather than a causal relationship. Two different approaches have been taken to address this issue: studies that started decades ago and included people in early life or midlife, and an alternative approach that focused on intermediate or endophenotypes—particularly brain imaging markers.

The World Dementia Council has declared that dementia risk reduction is crucial to the global dementia agenda, with strong evidence that interventions

for cardiovascular risk could improve cognitive health at the population level. Increasing evidence suggests that many other lifestyle-related factors, including diabetes, obesity, physical and mental inactivity, depression, smoking, low educational attainment, and diet, have a role in dementia, and the potential for primary prevention related to such modifiable risk factors is huge but yet to be fully explored

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects memory, thinking, and behavior. While the exact cause of Alzheimer's is unknown, there are several risk factors that can increase your chances of developing the disease. Age is the greatest known risk factor for Alzheimer's disease, with most cases diagnosed in people 65 and older. Family history, genetics, lifestyle factors, and head injury are some of the factors that can increase your risk of developing the disease.

It is important to note that having one or more of these risk factors does not mean you will definitely develop Alzheimer's disease. There are many other factors that can contribute to the development of the disease, and some people with no known risk factors still develop Alzheimer's. If you are concerned about your risk of Alzheimer's disease, talk to your doctor, who can assess your individual risk factors and recommend ways to reduce your risk.

TREATMENT

Cholinesterase inhibitors: These drugs function by raising acetylcholine levels, a neurotransmitter critical to cognition and memory. Cholinesterase inhibitors such as donepezil, galantamine, and rivastigmine are prescribed for mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease.

Memantine: This drug functions differently by controlling glutamate, another neurotransmitter in the brain. It is used in conjunction with cholinesterase inhibitors to treat moderate-to-severe Alzheimer's disease.

Antipsychotics: Some people with Alzheimer's disease may experience behavioral symptoms such as agitation, aggressiveness, and hallucinations. These drugs can help manage these symptoms.

Non-pharmaceutical treatments:

Activities and exercises intended to stimulate the brain and enhance cognitive performance are part of cognitive stimulation treatment.

Physical activity: Research has demonstrated that regular exercise improves cognitive performance and general well-being in Alzheimer's patients.

Social engagement: Retaining social links and taking part in fulfilling activities can lessen stress, elevate mood, and delay cognitive aging.

Nutrition and diet: Consuming a balanced diet high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains may help maintain brain function and may slow the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

It's crucial to remember that:

Depending on the patient and the disease's stage, these therapies may or may not be beneficial.

It's important to discuss any adverse effects from medications with a doctor in order to identify the best course of action.

Medication is frequently used with non-pharmacological therapies to give a holistic strategy for controlling Alzheimer's.

Latest developments:

Lecanemab: This medication received FDA approval in 2023 for the treatment of early Alzheimer's disease. It works by removing amyloid plaques, and protein deposits in the brain associated with Alzheimer's.

Donanemab: This drug is currently under review by the FDA for the treatment of early Alzheimer's and has shown promising results in slowing disease progression in clinical trials.

Ongoing research:

Scientists are actively researching new medications and therapies to slow the progression of Alzheimer's, prevent its onset, and potentially even find a cure.

It's crucial to consult with a healthcare professional for personalized advice regarding Alzheimer's treatment. They can assess the individual's specific needs and develop a treatment plan that incorporates the most appropriate options based on the latest research and evidence.

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