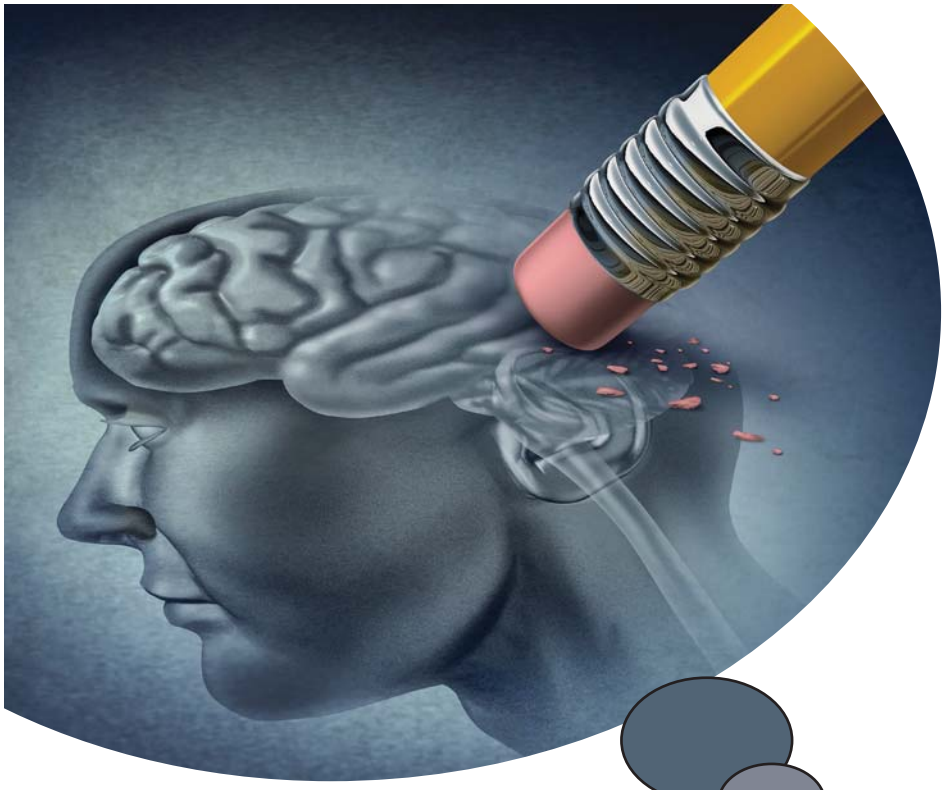

FADED MEMORIES

Awareness is the need of the hour.

By DP Sabharwal

Alzheimer's is a type of dementia and accounts for almost 75 per cent of dementia cases. It is a neuro-degenerative disease in which the neurons (brain cells) start decaying and dying at an accelerated pace and the patient is reduced to a virtual bed-ridden skeleton not able to speak, recognise, walk, eat, express, or even indicate anything whatsoever.

All this happens slowly and gradually over a period of time that usually lasts from 6-12 years. It is primarily an old age disease affecting people above 65 years of age, but the disease that has no cure as of now. Last year, there were 16 lakh deaths worldwide due to Alzheimer's, but the reported number is much less than actual deaths because a huge number are never even reported for this silent and slow killing disease, more so in developing countries like India. And there are primarily two reasons for this: firstly, it is considered a taboo to talk about any mental illness in front of any family member. Secondly, the disease starts with forgetfulness, which unfortunately is associated with a normal old-age problem and hence, not considered a disease at all. However, it is not so. It is related to gradual dying of brain-cells. There is a need for better understanding of this disease since the numbers are increasing every year.

It is commonly believed that 'memory-loss or forgetfulness' denotes the symptoms for Alzheimer's disease. Well, nothing is far from the truth. There are many more distinct signs and symptoms that would indicate the onset of this disease. The ten clear signs that point towards Alzheimer's are:



- ***Current memory loss which disrupts daily life:*** Forgetting recently learnt information, what was eaten for breakfast, not able to remember important dates or events, and asking for same information over and over again.
- ***Difficulties in planning or solving basic problems:*** Having trouble following a familiar recipe or keeping track of monthly bills or taking much longer to do a routine task.
- ***Difficulty in completing familiar tasks:*** Needing help to use the settings of a microwave, to play a particular TV channel or driving to a familiar location.
- ***Confusion with time or place:*** Losing track of seasons, days of the week, dates, forgetting where one is going or how the affected person got there.
- ***Trouble understanding visual images or spatial relationships:*** Difficulty in reading, judging distances, determining colours or contrast.

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- ***Problems with words in speaking or writing:*** Having trouble following or joining a conversation, difficulty in getting the right words or not being able to write logically.
- ***Misplacing things or putting things in unusual places:*** Consequently, losing the ability to find the misplaced item, and then accusing others of stealing.
- ***Decreased or poor judgement about simple and routine things:*** Poorly dealing with money, forgetting to brush their teeth as well as ignoring personal grooming and hygiene.
- ***Withdrawal from work or social activities:*** Distancing from hobbies and social activities, avoiding participation in work projects or sports, and avoiding being social.
- ***Changes in mood and personality:*** Becoming confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful or anxious, and getting easily upset.

Detection of Alzheimer's disease even today is very difficult because the doctor has to be told all that is happening to the patient. Unlike for other life-threatening diseases such as cancer, HIV-AIDS, diabetes, and heart attacks, there is no medical test for detecting Alzheimer's. It is therefore necessary that one is aware of all that happens to a patient suffering from Alzheimer's. Ten areas listed above is the only guide towards establishing the onset of Alzheimer's. We



KOKO'S FAVOURITE

My husband is the kind who isn't very fond of pets. I wanted to adopt a dog but my husband was strictly against it.

Then, once, we had gone on a late-night drive. As we stopped near a viewpoint for a break, we heard a small weak yelp of a pup. We looked around in the dark and finally found a tiny little pup, lying near the road. It looked only about a few weeks old. It was covered in mud and had some injuries on its leg. We picked him up and carried it to our house immediately. In that moment, my husband didn't even protest. We nursed the pup back to life, took him to the vet and soon, he was able to walk properly. When the pup fully recovered, I suggested we put him up for adoption. But my husband said that we can keep him for a while. I knew the pup had started to melt his heart. We named him Koko. Eight months later, they are inseparable. This is the same guy who wouldn't even let me pet street dogs, and now he considers Koko his son.

-Shanaya Patel

KARAOKE NIGHT

One thing that my husband is very proud of is his singing. Don't get me wrong though, he's not a good singer, he just thinks he is. He is always off-key and can't take a high note. His self-confidence has blinded him that he can't hear how awful his singing really is. But whenever he sings, he sings with so much passion that I have never had the heart to break it to him that he's actually not that good.

Then, at his annual office party, they decided to put up a karaoke bar. My husband got very excited that he would sing in front of everyone. I was afraid that people would make fun of him so I tried to dissuade him. He was still adamant and went up to the stage. He grabbed the mike and started singing the popular Hindi song, *Mere sapno ki raani*. The crowd went silent and I held my breath. Then suddenly, everyone erupted in cheers. They loved him! All of them started singing along with him. I realised that all of them adored my husband and it was a sight to see him sing badly on stage. It was such a lovely incident that I also joined my husband on stage and started singing with him. We were both terrible at it but we were having the time of our lives.

-Kirtika Suresh