



Alzheimer's Disease

Areas of focus for VA research on Alzheimer's disease include finding potential drug therapies for prevention and treatment, exploring the genetic and environmental causes of the disease, and studying the best ways to provide long-term care. Additionally, VA researchers are working to better understand the connection between Alzheimer's and other chronic diseases, such as diabetes.



Examples of VA Research Advances

New center will refine brain-scan methods – A team at the San Francisco VA will receive \$6.04 million over five years from the National Institutes of Health to develop new ways to examine the brain through magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). The award will create a “Biomedical Technology Research Center” focused on improving several MRI methods. Among the end goals: to better diagnose and track neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's.

Caregiver study expanded – An individualized approach to helping family caregivers of older Veterans with Alzheimer's, shown successful in earlier research, is being rolled out in community-based VA programs in 20 cities. The program, called “Resources for Enhancing Alzheimer's Caregiver Health,” or REACH, works with caregivers over six months to give them the skills and resources they need most. An economic analysis of the program showed that it costs only about five dollars a day to give caregivers an extra hour in their day, free from the stress of caring for their relative.

Protecting the brain with natural compounds – VA investigators have been studying a number of natural compounds believed to ward off cognitive decline and Alzheimer's disease. Among them are grape seed extract; curcumin, the compound that gives turmeric its yellow color; and DHA, an omega-3 fatty acid found mainly in fatty, cold-water fish. DHA supplements are now being tested in a nationwide clinical trial led by a geriatric neurologist at the Portland VA.

Facts About Alzheimer's Disease

One of the most common forms of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, a progressive neurodegenerative condition. In this biological disease of the brain, deterioration occurs in nerve cells and parts of the brain controlling thought, memory, and language. As the disease progresses, symptoms range from mild forgetfulness to serious impairment and inability to perform everyday tasks. Alzheimer's is estimated to affect some 4.5 million Americans, and this figure is expected to triple by 2050. About five percent of men and women ages 65 to 74 have the disease, and nearly 50 percent of those age 85 and older may be affected. The annual direct and indirect costs of caring for Americans with the disease are estimated to be around \$100 billion.

