

Alzheimer's disease... it's more than you think
First wave of baby boomers turning 65 not ready for
Alzheimer's
Alzheimer Society survey reveals alarming knowledge gap

Canadians can test their own knowledge at
www.alzheimer.ca/testyourknowledge

Kitchener, ON, January 4, 2011 - An online survey of baby boomers across Canada conducted by the Alzheimer Society reveals a worrying lack of awareness about Alzheimer's disease.

Survey results show that an astonishing 23 per cent of boomers can't name any of the early signs of Alzheimer's disease, even though their risk doubles every five years after age 65.

Of those surveyed, 50 per cent identified memory loss as a key symptom, but failed to mention other critical signs.

"Boomers can take steps to protect themselves from Alzheimer's disease," says Charlotte Sider, Public Education Coordinator for the Alzheimer Society of Kitchener-Waterloo.

Most boomers are familiar with the common hallmark of Alzheimer's disease of not recognizing familiar faces and objects. But less than half know about life-altering changes, such as hallucinations or total dependency on others for basic care, that occur in the disease's later stages. More troubling, respondents are unaware that diabetes, obesity, heart disease and chronic depression significantly increase their odds for developing the disease.

Today's findings confirm a disturbing lack of knowledge about Alzheimer's disease among boomers, the country's largest demographic group, who will become increasingly at risk as they age. But the reasons for self-awareness and prevention have never been more compelling. Without a cure or drugs to stop the disease, Alzheimer's is destined to be the most pressing and costly health issue boomers will face in their lifetime: either they will get the disease themselves or be faced with caring for someone with the disease.

Barb Eastman-Lewin started noticing changes in her father during his late fifties. "Dad would leave the dinner table to get the sugar and come back empty handed. As the dementia progressed, he became more forgetful and had trouble using the telephone. Dad's driving skills started to become worrisome." There were other behaviors later on that Barb did not realize were symptoms of dementia such as hallucinations and paranoia. Barb recognized that acknowledging your loved one may have Alzheimer's disease is an extremely difficult thing to do, but urges everyone to see their physician early and, once the diagnosis is confirmed, get the support and

knowledge you need from your local Alzheimer Society. “It’s a long journey and every caregiver or family member needs help to get through it. There is an incredible amount of support out there from the Alzheimer Society for all those affected by dementia”.

During Alzheimer Awareness Month, the Alzheimer Society is asking Canadians to test their own knowledge by taking the survey at www.alzheimer.ca/testyourknowledge. The Society also urges Canadians, especially those 40 and older, to practice prevention by learning the risks and making simple lifestyle changes: eat a heart-healthy diet, stay active, exercise regularly, maintain a healthy weight and monitor their blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

About Alzheimer’s disease

Alzheimer’s disease is the leading form of dementia. It is a fatal progressive disease of the brain that robs memory and steals the ability to reason, communicate and perform daily tasks. Changes in the brain can begin to appear decades before diagnosis and progression can last between seven and 10 years. Eventually, the person affected will require 24-hour care and supervision. Age is the single biggest risk factor but the disease can also strike as early as 40.

About the survey

More than 1,000 Canadians aged 45 to 65 completed the survey in July 2010. Men and women were split evenly. Of those surveyed, 37 per cent had some personal connection to the disease. None were affiliated with the Alzheimer Society in any way, nor have they or a family member donated to or used any of the Society’s programs and services. Boomers were tested in three areas: early signs of Alzheimer’s disease (unaided and aided awareness); later-stage symptoms (aided), and key risk factors (aided). To read the results, visit www.alzheimer.ca/testyourknowledge

About your local Alzheimer Society

Behind every person with Alzheimer’s disease or related dementias, there are hundreds of people dedicated to helping. The Alzheimer Society of Kitchener-Waterloo, the Alzheimer Society of Cambridge and volunteers bring help and hope for the over 9,500 people in our region living with dementia and their caregivers. Our mission is to assist all those affected by Alzheimer’s disease and related dementia to live with dignity and respect by delivering programs, providing information, supporting research and providing a voice for them within our community.

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