

Alzheimer's affects family and friends

500,000 cases expected by the year 2000

January is Alzheimer Awareness Month and the Alzheimer Society of Canada is raising public's consciousness of the disease and those affected by it through a national campaign.

Alzheimer Disease is a degenerative neurological disease that currently affects 300,000 Canadians. At the present time, there is no known cause or cure for this disease, which causes 10,000 deaths a year.

The Alzheimer Society notes that as demographics shift and the population as a whole ages, the number of cases of Alzheimer Disease will rise dramatically.

For its victims, Alzheimer Disease means the progressive deterioration of mental and physical capacities. Those caring for Alzheimer Disease sufferers often experience enormous financial and emotional strain, because support systems for Alzheimer victims and their families are inadequate.

Alzheimer Disease is the fourth leading cause of death among Canada's elderly and it is estimated as many as 500,000 Canadians will be affected by Alzheimer Disease by the end of the century.

elderly most vulnerable

Alzheimer Disease attacks both men and women and those over the age of 65 are most vulnerable to the disease. Initial phase symptoms of Alzheimer Disease include memory loss and confusion. As the disease progresses, other mental func-

tions, such as language and orientation, continue to diminish. In the late stages of the disease, the victim may suffer from seizures, muscular rigidity, and difficulties in coping with washing, eating and personal hygiene.

Eventually, the Alzheimer victim will require constant nursing care.

Accurate diagnosis of Alzheimer Disease is of the utmost importance, because certain symptoms can be caused by other, treatable illnesses. Diagnosing Alzheimer Disease requires extensive testing by a neurologist to determine shrinkage of the brain and alteration or disappearance of nerve cells. Absolute confirmation of the diagnosis can only be obtained through an autopsy.

disease affects entire family

Alzheimer Disease affects not only the victim - family members of the patient must often take on the responsibility of full-time caregiving. Looking after an Alzheimer patient requires enormous physical and emotional energy.

There are many patterns in the type and severity of Alzheimer Disease and in the sequence in which mental changes occur. In a minority of cases, the progress of the disease is quite rapid. More often, however, the illness proceeds slowly over a number of years, and the patient experiences long periods with little change in his condition. The best one can do for an

Alzheimer patient is to keep his life simple, calm and routine.

The Alzheimer Society of Canada is a registered charity that was founded in 1977 and granted a Federal Charter as a non-profit organization in 1978. It was the first national society of its kind in the world. Today, approximately 10,000 Canadians belong to more than 70 Associations and Local Chapters of the Alzheimer Society.

The Alzheimer Society of Canada is also affiliated with the Canadian Neurological Coalition and Alzheimer Disease International.

Alzheimer Society has number of goals

The aims of the Alzheimer Society are to support and encourage research into Alzheimer Disease and related conditions; to promote public and professional awareness of the disease; to create family resource centers; to address the issue of long-term placement for patients; and to represent all groups involved before all levels of government.

So little is known about Alzheimer Disease because mental impairment in the elderly was long considered a natural part of growing old. Even though many types of senile and pre-senile dementia (loss of impairment of mental powers) are now being associated with Alzheimer Disease, it is only in the last decade that the widespread occurrence of Alzheimer Disease was recognized and investigated.

Although we still don't know the cause of, or cure for, Alzheimer Disease, research has made big strides in the last 10 years. Current research points to four major theories about Alzheimer Disease:

four theories

1. Although it is known that one type of Alzheimer Disease (Familial Alzheimer Disease) can be inherited, it is suspected that other, apparently sporadic cases of the disease may also be linked to a genetic defect.

2. A slow-acting virus which is released by the brain itself may be the cause of Alzheimer Disease.

3. Environmental factors along, or when combined with a genetic predisposition toward the disease, may be involved.

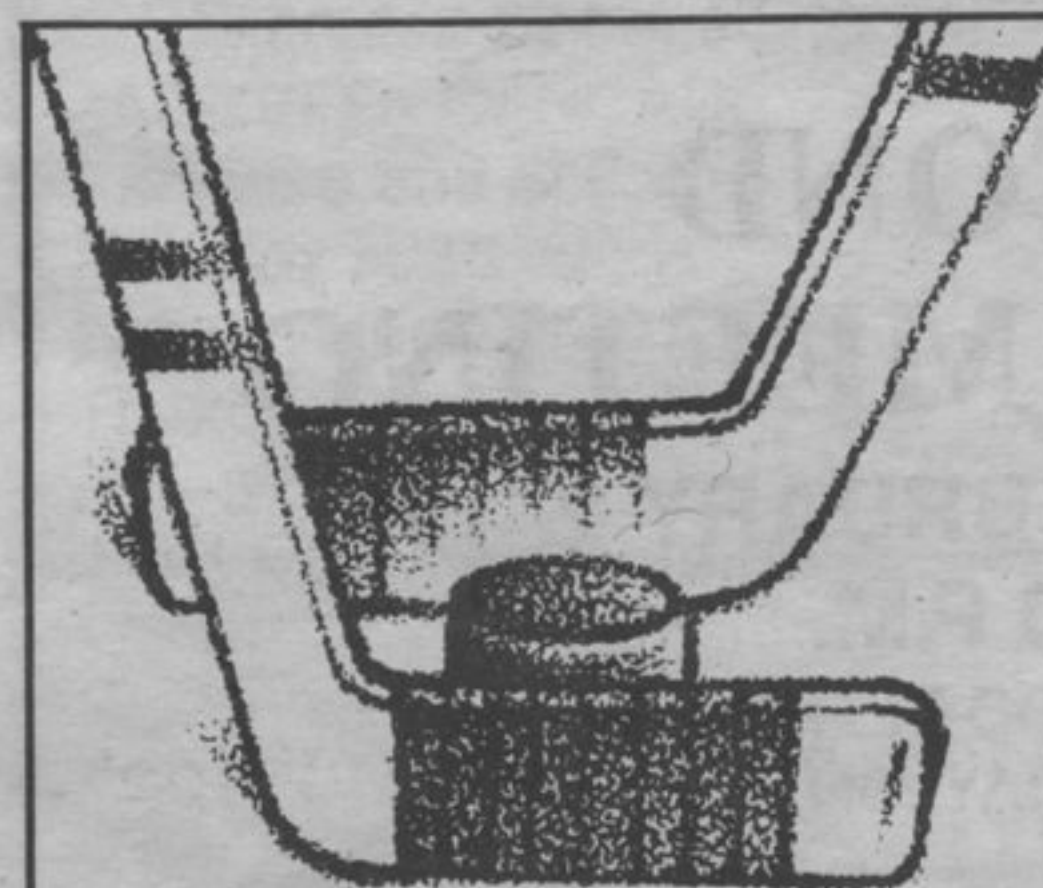
4. Acetylcholine, a chemical in the brain that carries messages

between nerve cells involved in memory, has been found to be lacking in Alzheimer patients. Victims of the disease also exhibit increased amounts of amyloid protein in the brain. Scientists are investigating the implications of both discoveries.

The disease was first described by a German neurologist, Alois Alzheimer, in 1906.

Alzheimer Disease may last from two to 20 years after its onset. It has been described as "the worst of all diseases", not just for what it does to the victim, but for its devastating effects on family and friends.

Help is available to victims and their families through the Alzheimer Society and its 70 affiliated organizations. Family support meetings are held on the 4th Tuesday of the month at St. Joseph's Heritage at 7:00 p.m., Thunder Bay.



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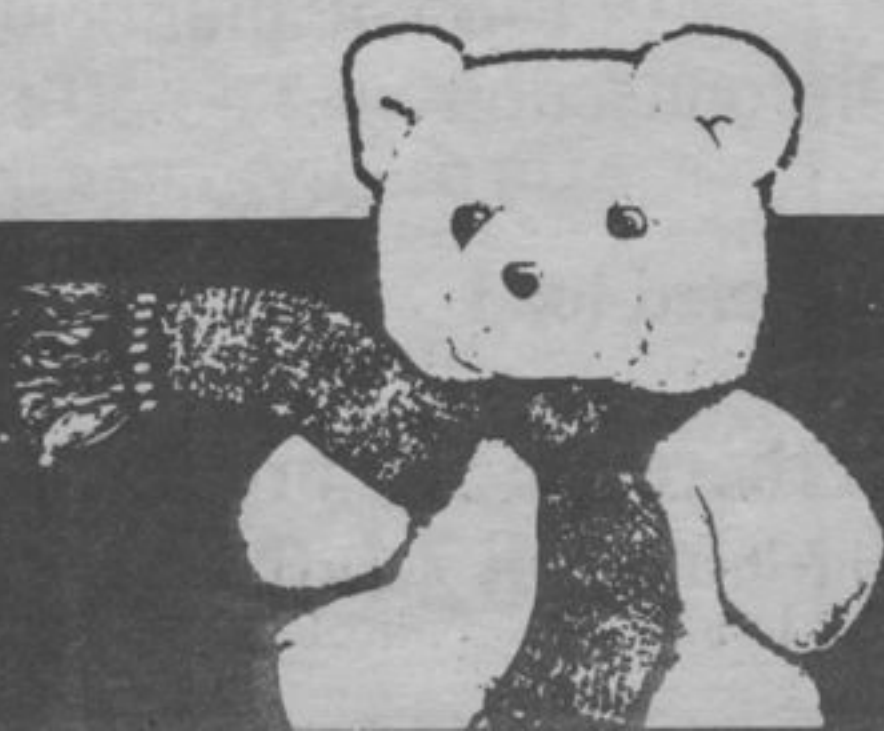
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