Dementia in Elderly

Understanding Dementia

- It refers to a brain disorder, and is characterized by a progressive decline in an individual’s cognitive functions.
- Affects the said persons thought process, reasoning skills, speech and the ability to learn and grasp new concepts.
- Being a degenerative disease, over a period of time, the person loses the ability to take care of himself/herself.

Types of Dementia:

- The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer’s disease
- The second most common form of dementia is called vascular dementia and is caused by the death of brain cells.
- Both forms of dementia mentioned above are irreversible, meaning, they cannot be cured.
- Other forms of dementia are Frontotemporal dementia and Alcohol related dementia.
- Dementia can also be spotted in patients suffering from Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis, endocrine deficiency, Creutzfeld Jakob’s disease, AIDS and also those who have suffered injuries to the head.

Causes of Dementia

- Stress
- Grief
- Fatigue
- Alcohol abuse
- Major illnesses
- Vitamin deficiency
- Poor nutrition
- Issues related to the thyroid gland

Symptoms of Dementia:

- The main symptom of dementia is memory loss.
- Mainly, those suffering from dementia have issues related to short-term memory loss, inability to think of problems and their solutions and severe loss of concentration.
• Poor judgment, lack of initiative and sudden problems with language and communication.
• As the disease progresses, the individual suffering from dementia faces the following issues:
  o Convulsions
  o Chest infection
  o Urinary tract infection
• In addition to this, dementia is also linked with other major illnesses/diseases such as cancer, stroke and heart attacks.

Assessment of the condition
• Doctors refer to the persons complete medical history and also use various tests such as a mental test score, a mini mental state examination and other such tests that help them evaluate the individual’s ability in terms of measure memory, problem solving, counting and language skills.
• Medical tests are conducted that involve analyzing the blood, urine and/or spinal fluid of the patient, to assess whether the dementia is caused by some other factor.
• Doctors also make use of CT scans and MRI’s to search for tumors, clots, signs of an impending stroke and so on.

Treatment:
• It has to be noted that dementia, though treatable, is incurable.
• The treatment provided to those suffering from dementia is generally a combination of medication, behavioral strategies and environmental interventions.
• Constant care and monitoring of such patients is required at all times, by a neurologist as well as a psychiatrist.
• Family members and friends play a vital role, in the sense that, they can help provide comfort to the patient and in the process, help keep the behavioral problems under check.

How to avoid Dementia:
• Engaging in activities that stimulate the brain.
• Keeping stress levels under control through meditation, reading, listening to classical music and so on.
• Regular health check-up’s to monitor blood pressure levels, cholesterol levels and homocysteine levels.
• Regular exercise.
• Adequate rest (6-8 hours of sleep every day, assists in preventing memory loss)
• Healthy, balanced diet.
How to take care of patients suffering from Dementia:

- Regular health check-ups are a must.
- Regular exercise and a healthy diet is necessary to avoid obesity and also, to ensure an adequate dietary intake of vitamins and the other essentials.
- Caregivers and family members should develop a positive attitude, as those suffering from dementia are capable of reading body language and also respond to the positive attitude displayed by those around them.
- Caregivers and family members should acknowledge the requests of the patient suffering from dementia and should be supportive, loving and interactive.