Will I Get Alzheimer’s? Managing Alzheimer’s Anxiety

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Feeling Anxious About Alzheimer’s

Alzheimer’s disease is not delicate or mild. When it comes, it leaves a striking impression on all that come in contact with it. The people with the diagnosis, as well as those who love and care for them, are affected and impacted. The influence differs in significant ways, though.

For the patient, the influences of the condition are well-known. The memory problems, confusion, lost items, issues with expressive language, social withdrawal, and behavioral changes may be subtle at first, but they will progressively intensify as the condition develops.

These symptoms are not typical of normal functioning and aging. They are abnormal and very problematic as they can lead to decreased safety and security.

But what about the loved ones? How does this notorious disease affect them?

Certainly, some will take the diagnosis and deterioration in stride, finding positive motivation and a silver lining in the disease. Others will not be so fortunate.

This second group will be influenced by the condition in many negative ways that can create unwanted issues for their mental and physical health. They will take on too much responsibility or stretch their resources too thin.

Perhaps, they will not fall back on trusted supports to recover and recuperate. These patterns will end with consequences like:

- Increased stress
- Depression
- Anger
- Physical fatigue and burnout
- Isolation
- Feelings of guilt and shame
- Confusion
- Anxiety

The Introduction of Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal human feeling ingrained due to its ability to serve as protection from injury and pain. Anxiety *disorders* are something entirely different.

Anxiety disorders fit into a multifaceted category of mental health disorders that can indicate a range of symptoms. For this purpose, an anxiety disorder will be defined broadly as a condition associated with high worry,

physical tension, changes with eating, changes with sleeping, and feeling restless or keyed up.

Anxiety is a disorder of questions. People with anxiety related to the Alzheimer's diagnosis of a loved one would ask questions like:

- What am I going to do?
- How am I going to deal with this?
- What if he cannot live alone anymore?
- What if she wonders from the house?
- How are we going to pay for care?
- What if he dies?

The questions of anxiety are not met with an answer — they are met with more questions, and more questions fuel further anxiety.

Anxiety: Normal Versus Abnormal

Just like Alzheimer's symptoms differ from the normal aging process, anxiety disorder symptoms will differ from normal, typical anxiety. Rather than being an agent of action, the anxiety will act as a tremendous hindrance.

Motivation and performance are inversely related to abnormal levels of anxiety. When anxiety is higher, you will be left unproductive and frustrated.

Let's take the example of a commonly asked question following an Alzheimer's diagnosis: What if I am next? This is nature and normal concern, but it can still trigger unreasonably high anxiety.

Part of the grieving process involves questioning your mortality and wondering how and when you will die. Will you get Alzheimer's, too? Will you be older or younger? What happens in late stage dementia? What if you cannot care for yourself?

Answer the Questions to End Anxiety

If you want to manage your anxiety, you must answer the questions that seem to be without answers. To complete this, focus on answers that:

- Are based in fact
- Are clear and concise without any modifiers
- Improve your well-being

Maybe you worry there is a familial quality to the condition that was already passed down to you. Luckily, there is a simple way to answer this fear: look it up.

It won't take much browsing to learn that, like other conditions, Alzheimer's has various risk factors that include age and family history, but this is the important part: only about five percent of Alzheimer's cases are a direct cause of genes passed down the family line.

For you, this means the odds of you getting Alzheimer's just because your family member did are low. This is what you need to repeat when the anxious questions enter your mind.

Saying "the odds are low" is factual, concise, and improves your well-being.

These are anxiety-busting qualities that will preserve your motivation and improve your performance. With these present, you can focus on completing activities that actually enrich your life rather than worrying about the risk of bad events occurring in the future. Great options include:

- Exercising your body
- Exercising your mind
- Avoiding risks like tobacco and alcohol
- Strengthening your social network

Completing some or all of these activities will have a much better impact on your Alzheimer’s risk than an infinite amount of worry.

Alzheimer’s sends shockwaves through the community of people that know and love the sufferer. As a loved one, you are vulnerable to the onslaught of anxiety, especially a fear that you will soon develop the condition.

Resist this risk by acknowledging and answering the questions that anxiety sends your way. Once the questions are put to rest, you can focus on the activities that really matter.