

What's the Difference Between Alzheimer's and Normal Age-Related Memory Loss?

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For many decades, people thought that "senility" was a natural part of getting older. Is there a difference between Alzheimer's disease and normal age-related memory loss?

Answer: Alzheimer's disease is not a normal part of aging or "just what happens when we get old." If Alzheimer's was part of the natural aging process, then every person over 65 years of age would have Alzheimer's disease.

While people do experience minor changes in their memory and thinking as they age, these changes don't affect daily functioning or the ability to live independently. Here are five differences between normal age-related memory loss and Alzheimer's disease:

In normal age-related memory loss, someone might forget part of an experience, but a person with Alzheimer's disease will forget the whole experience.

In normal age-related memory loss, a person who forgets something will eventually remember the information; however, a person with Alzheimer's won't recall the information at a later time.

In normal age-related memory loss, a person can usually follow instructions (verbal or written) without difficulty, but a person with Alzheimer's disease is less and less able to follow instructions over time.

In normal age-related memory loss, using notes and other reminders is helpful, but people with Alzheimer's gradually become less able to benefit from memory aids.

In normal age-related memory loss, people can still manage their own personal care (bathing, dressing, grooming, etc.), but those with Alzheimer's lose the ability to engage in these kinds of tasks.

Source: <http://alzheimers.about.com/od/whatisalzheimer1/f/NormalAging.htm?nl=1>