

World Alzheimer's Month 2023: Shining a Light on Alzheimer's – Domenico Praticò, MD, FCPP

Since 2012, September has been celebrated as **World Alzheimer's Month**. Back then, and only eleven years ago, an average of 2 out of 3 people had little understanding of Alzheimer's disease and associated dementias. Originally conceived as an international campaign with two main goals: to raise awareness about Alzheimer's disease and challenge the stigma often associated with it. This month-long series of events is designed to shed light on and inform more people about the disease and its profound impact on patients and their families. The campaign culminates on September 21st, designated as World Alzheimer's Day.

I am so pleased to share that this year's theme for Alzheimer's Month is very dear to my heart: "***Never too early, never too late.***" We all know that the disease often starts years before symptoms appear and how important it is to make lifelong choices that favor healthy living and healthy aging. Since the number of people living with dementia is expected to triple in the next 25 years, there has never been a more urgent need to understand and act upon the factors that influence cognition and are associated with the risk of developing dementia.

The campaign emphasizes the crucial role played by well-identified lifestyle risk factors for the disease and the importance of adopting measures that actively and significantly reduce them in order to prevent or delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease. In fact, studies have shown that up to 30% of Alzheimer's disease cases could be prevented, as they are secondary to a few modifiable risk factors such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes mellitus, and obesity. In support of this year's goal for World Alzheimer's Month, I would like to take the opportunity to reinforce some additional concepts about the disease.

- Alzheimer's disease is the most expensive disease in the US, with the total national cost of caring for those with Alzheimer's and other dementias estimated at \$320 billion a year. The disease is one of America's most critical public health issues, costing taxpayers over \$19 million every hour.
- Alzheimer's disease cannot be entirely prevented, but adopting healthy lifestyle habits can reduce the risk. Staying mentally active, engaging in regular physical activity, and eating a healthy diet benefit both your body and brain.
- Early detection matters. Early diagnosis allows better access to quality medical care and support services while providing the opportunity for people with Alzheimer's disease to participate in decisions about their care, including space and time for an individual to provide informed consent for current and future plans.

- Alzheimer's risk is higher among women, and Alzheimer's diagnosis is more common in women. More than 2/3 of patients with Alzheimer's disease are women, and they have a one-in-six chance of developing the disease, compared to men who have a one-in-eleven chance. Unfortunately, women comprise the majority of dementia caregivers and receive less formal support than men.

As we continue our quest for the cure be assured that we are on a hopeful road of progress and continued research which brings us closer every day to that goal. But, and in tandem with research, it is just as meaningful to take a parallel path of personal progress via healthy lifestyle choices and knowledge. Every day each of us can take positive steps because it is, "***never too early, never too late.***"

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www.praticoi-lab.com

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