



SENIOR LEGAL LINK

Understanding The Valley's Seniors

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Events in November:

- Nov. 7 - Election Day
- Nov. 10 - Veterans Day (observed) [actual day is Nov. 11]
- Nov. 17 - Remembrance Day
- Nov. 22 - Thanksgiving Day
- Nov. 12-18 - National Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week

Monthly observances:

- American Diabetes Month
- Epilepsy Awareness Month
- Great American Smokeout Month
- Lung Cancer Awareness Month
- National AIDS Awareness Month
- National Alzheimer's Disease Month
- National Family Caregivers Month

NOVEMBER IS DIABETES AWARENESS MONTH!

Nearly 10 million Americans are at high risk for diabetes and 16 million Americans are currently afflicted with the disease. It is the leading cause of kidney failure, amputations and adult blindness. It is also a major cause of stroke and heart disease. Understanding the risk factors, causes, detection and treatment of the disease is vital for prevention and control.

Diabetes is a disease caused by abnormally high blood sugar levels in the body. Basically, the food we eat is broken down into sugar which is called glucose. This glucose is carried by our blood stream to the body's cells. Distribution of the sugar in the blood stream to the body's cells is dependant on insulin which is produced by the pancreas. Insulin is necessary for the body to use the sugar, the basic fuel for the cells in the body. Insulin takes the sugar from the blood to the cells. When the glucose builds up in the blood instead of going into the cells, cells are starved for energy. In type1 diabetes, which is diagnosed in children and young adults, the pancreas cannot produce enough insulin or the cells that produce the insulin are destroyed by the body as the immune system believing the pancreas is a foreign body. In this case insulin injections are required for survival, along with attention to diet and regular blood sugar tests. The causes of type1 diabetes are not completely understood although childhood infections or genetics may be an explanation.

It has been established, however, what causes type 2 diabetes. It accounts for 95 percent of all cases and according to the National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases it is most common in adults over 40, affects 8 percent of the U.S. population age 20 and older and compared to

whites, black adults have a 60 percent higher rate of type 2 diabetes and Hispanic adults have a 90 percent higher rate. Most importantly, type 2 diabetes is strongly associated with obesity. More than 80 percent of people with type 2 diabetes are overweight. Here the pancreas cannot produce enough insulin or the cells ignore the insulin. If the blood sugar levels are above normal the body has a problem converting food to energy. If the sugar cannot be distributed to the cells in the body, the cells are starved for energy and the blood sugar levels or glucose levels increase. Over time this can result in nerve and blood vessel damage which can lead to heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney disease, liver problems, gum infections and amputations. Symptoms can include increased hunger, fatigue, increased urination (especially at night), weight loss, blurred vision and sores that do not heal.

Diet, weight reduction, exercise and blood tests are important in controlling type 2 diabetes. A study performed by the Diabetes Prevention Program showed that exercising 30 minutes daily and losing 5-7 percent of body weight can reduce the risk of getting type 2 diabetes. Treatment with the drug Metformin also reduces the risk. Anyone over the age of 45 should consider getting tested. For those over 45 years and overweight, taking the fasting glucose test or the oral glucose tolerance test is strongly recommended.

Currently type 2 diabetes is considered an epidemic in this country and is strongly associated with obesity. The major causes of death in people with type 2 diabetes are cardiovascular disease and atherosclerosis.

Helpful Resources for Caregivers:

Family Caregiver Alliance
National Center on Caregiving
Tel: 800-445-8106
www.caregiver.org

National Family Caregivers Association
Tel: 800-896-3650
www.nfcares.org

ARCH National Respite Network
www.archrespite.org/index.htm

AARP
Tel: 888-687-2277
www.aarp.org/families/caregiving

Free State Program – California Telephone Access Program

The State of California offers phones for people who have difficulty hearing, seeing, moving, speaking or remembering. The program is **free**, with no obligation or income requirement. For more information, call 1-800-806-1191; for Spanish 1-800-949-5650.

Receive Telephone Service for \$6 or less each month

Lifeline Telephone Service saves you **50%** on local home phone service from the carrier of your choice. That's **\$6 or less** each month. Get connected to family, friends, job opportunities and emergency services. Lifeline may be for you, even if you've been disconnected. Find out if you're eligible today! Call toll-free 1-866-272-0349.

Lifeline Telephone Services is sponsored by the California Public Utilities Commission.

National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month

Twenty years ago Ronald Reagan declared November National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month. This October the National Institute on Aging presented plans for a \$60 million, 5-year government study of Alzheimer's disease (AD). The study will be funded by the government, pharmaceutical companies and the nonprofit Alzheimer's Association. Why the huge financial commitment? Because, each year approximately 100,000 people will die from the effects of AD and 360,000 new cases will be diagnosed. Worldwide 30 million people will be affected by the disease by 2020.

Alzheimer's disease is a fatal, progressive, irreversible brain disorder with an average duration of 7 years. There are three stages. In Stage 1 many experience lack of energy, minor memory loss, mood swings and decreased ability to learn. Patients also become confused and disoriented more easily. Stage 2 patients experience speech and comprehension difficulty. They may need assistance completing tasks like brushing hair and teeth. Short term memory is impaired and confusion about time and place set in. There is a loss of recognition for familiar faces. Depression begins as patients become frustrated by the degeneration. Stage 3, the last stage, leaves the patients with very little memory and an inability to recognize anyone. They cannot chew or swallow and they lose bladder and bowel control. The immune system is compromised leaving them vulnerable to pneumonia, infections and respiratory problems. At this point the patient is usually bed ridden. This is the terminal stage.

Dr. Alois Alzheimer performed a brain autopsy on a woman who died after suffering from years of memory loss, confusion and lack of comprehension. He discovered that this woman's brain had developed abnormal neurotic plaques around the nerve cells and twisted fibers known as neurofibrillary tangles inside the cells. To this day, confirmation of a death caused by AD can only be made by performing a brain autopsy.

Understanding the causes for developing the abnormal neurotic plaques and twisted fibers and how this can be prevented is still something of a mystery. Researches do know that four genes are

linked to late onset of the disease. However, this genetic component cannot be confirmation of the disease. Although a great deal of research must continue in order to provide answers for now, some scientist are focusing on education and diet. They are also exploring the connection between AD and high blood pressure, high cholesterol and low levels of the vitamin folate. These risk factors are the same that contribute to heart disease. Research is also focusing on the possible preventive effects of physical, mental and social activities on AD.

Different drugs are being used to treat the symptoms of the disease, some of which increase acetylcholine in the brain. Acetylcholine is a neurotransmitter which can help to slow down the erosion of cognitive thinking. Another drug protects the brain's nerve cells from a messenger chemical which is released by damaged brain cells. The chemical released by these damaged cells manifests itself in the symptoms of the disease. Vitamin E and Eldepryl have been shown in studies to slow down the loss of brain cells. Eldepryl increases brain chemicals in patients.

Again, confirmation of the disease can only be done by brain autopsy, however, physicians that specialize in AD and dementia are usually able to diagnose AD correctly 90 percent of the time. Using an MRI and CAT scan can help in the diagnosis, but it is the physician's specialized experience in the field of AD and dementia that is most valuable. Medical histories, evaluation of the patient's ability to carry out daily activities, memory and cognitive thinking processes, as well as medical tests, are used in diagnosing AD.

Alzheimer's disease affects more than its victims. Taking care of someone with AD can be overwhelming. As the disease progresses so do a caregiver's responsibilities. It's important to establish a strong relationship with the patient's physician. Caregivers need to take advantage of agencies that provide resources and information about the disease and join support groups. Fortunately, there are several valuable resources available nationwide to assist victims and their caregivers.

What is respite care? Respite care is "time off" for the caregiver. Respite care comes in different forms: from hiring an attendant to receiving relief from a friend or family member, adult day services or a brief stay at a care facility. It's extent can vary from a few hours to several weeks. The purpose of this short-term care is to give caregivers temporary relief from stress and time to take care of themselves. This in turn will help prevent burnout of the caregiver and abuse or neglect of the care recipient.