

News Column for Use Week of 5/31/2021
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River Valley Extension District
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Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month

June is Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month. Alzheimer's is a progressive brain disease that over time destroys one's thinking abilities, memories, and ability to carry out simple tasks. Currently, around 5 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's disease with this number projected to rise to 16 million by the year 2050.

Researchers believe early detection of Alzheimer's disease will be important to understand how to prevent, slow, and eventually stop it in the future. To detect Alzheimer's early it is important to understand the 10 warning signs of the disease. These have been defined by the Alzheimer's Association as memory loss that disrupts daily life, challenges in planning or solving problems, confusion with place or time, difficulty finishing familiar tasks (at home, work, or leisure), difficulty understanding visual images and spatial relationships, changes in mood and personality, withdrawal from social activities or work, new problems with words in writing or speaking, misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps, and poor or decreased judgment.

Alzheimer's is irreversible and it cannot be prevented, slowed, or cured. However, steps can be taken to live an overall brain-healthy lifestyle. Engaging in a brain-healthy lifestyle can improve your well-being, overall health, and it may reduce the risk of cognitive decline as you age. Some of these steps include engaging in regular exercise (at least 150 minutes per week), stop smoking, wearing a helmet to protect your head, eating a healthy diet (emphasis on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains), try to maintain a healthy weight and control your blood pressure, challenge your brain by learning something new, playing games or cards, and staying social with family, friends, and your community. These habits are best implemented early and continued throughout your lifetime, but it is never too late to adopt healthy lifestyle practices.

You can learn more about Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month by visiting the Alzheimer's Association website at <https://www.alz.org/>. If you have questions about Alzheimer's resources you can contact Jordan Schuette, Adult Development and Aging Agent at 785-325-2121.

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