

# Los Angeles Daily News

## Senior Living: Families facing early Alzheimer's disease are not alone

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One of the questions that I receive most frequently goes something like this: why are there so many more people being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease (AD) and other dementias today compared to two or three generations ago? The simple answer is that more of us are living longer today than ever before and age is the number one risk factor for developing dementia. In fact, about 40 percent of individuals over the age of 80 have some form of cognitive impairment and if you haven't heard, those living past 85 is one of the fastest growing populations in the United States.



There's also a secondary reason for an increase in diagnosis of dementia. The assessment tools available to diagnose a broad spectrum of cognitive impairment are more accurate now than they were 20 or 30 years ago. Because AD is the most feared disease among adults over the age of 55, individuals who experience memory challenges may be more likely to check in with a health care professional to determine the cause and hopefully rule out a progressive neurodegenerative disorder like AD.

This, along with an increase in public awareness of strategies to promote prevention of neurodegenerative disorders, the number of individuals diagnosed in the early stages of AD and other dementias has increased significantly.

Receiving a diagnosis of AD or another dementia can be debilitating for both patient and family. Fear of the unknown and what will happen next is a common source of stress. Additionally, families are often uninformed about the causes and types of dementia, how they progress and what to expect at each stage, how to plan for long term care, and where to find support in the community. Taken together, this lack of information and support may exact an excessive emotional toll on all involved. Gratefully, I may have some solutions for you.

Southern Californians living with early memory loss have access to community-based programs designed to instill hope, build community, and provide access to expert information toward living one's best life.

### Memory Club

This program, sponsored by **Alzheimer's Los Angeles**, Beach Cities Health District, and Always Best Care South Bay, is made up of a select group of peers who are experiencing early memory loss and their families. The group meets for six to eight consecutive weeks and offers participants the skills and support needed to tackle the daily challenges related to cognitive impairment and memory loss. Each week includes an interactive educational presentation on a relevant topic including:

- What to expect as the disease progresses
- Treatment options and clinical trials
- Diet and exercise programming
- Cultivating happiness and purpose
- Introduction to community resources
- Strategies for strengthening working and short term memory
- How to effectively manage stress and adapt to adversity

The presentations are immediately followed by two parallel support groups: one for folks with memory challenges and other for family care partners. The support group format provides each collaborative the opportunity to share their stories, problem solve, and gain emotional support in a safe environment with others who are facing similar challenges. Nearly 98% of past participants agree or strongly agree that what was learned in Memory Club improved their lives.

Applications to participate in the upcoming six-week session tentatively scheduled for March 28 through May 4 are now being accepted. The program is free. For more information, email [dhart@abc-seniors.com](mailto:dhart@abc-seniors.com) or call (310) 792-8666 and ask for Dr. Hart.

### **Early Memory Loss Forum**

**Hosted by Alzheimer's Los Angeles, the conference is a day-long program providing support, education and resources for caregivers, families, and individuals facing early memory loss. The event is 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. April 6 at the Torrance Memorial Hoffman Health Conference Center, 3315 Medical Center Drive. Admission is \$20 and limited scholarships are available. Register at [alzheimersla.org](http://alzheimersla.org).**

The take away message: you are not alone. Our community has programs and services that can help you navigate the challenges of early memory loss. In reaching out for support, you likely have nothing to lose and almost everything to gain: information, support and community.