

# Alzheimer's Disease

## **Alzheimer's Disease – advances in treatment**

Alzheimer's disease – this diagnosis activates fear and despair in nearly all people concerned. Therefore the psychiatrist will initially try to exclude all other diseases via magnetic resonance tomography or PET (schema of the metabolism processes in the brain), EEG (brain wave transfer), a psychological examination and an interview, since approx. 6 – 10% of all kinds of dementia can be treated successfully.

The general practitioner should make an electrocardiography and a radiograph of the thorax as well as a blood test. The close cooperation between general practitioner and psychiatrist is indispensable due to the numerous problems caused by the disease. The diagnosis is similar to putting a puzzle together; the more parts can be found the clearer the picture will become. More recently German researcher (Universities of Goettingen and Munich) were able to improve early detection of the disease. But still nowadays only the pathologist can clearly confirm the diagnosis.

In the course of time patients regularly suffers from depression, behave aggressive or anxious and develop sleeping and perception disorders. In these cases administering a medication can either improve the condition or mitigate it. Additionally psychotherapy can support by means of encouragement (e. g. brain jogging), mourning due to the mental losses experienced, mediation of practical support as well as conversations with relatives/partners. In cases of perception disorders new medications which already show a good efficacy with small doses and are well-tolerated can be recommended (e. g. risperdale, zyprexy, solian, seroquel, nipolept).

There is increasing hope to be able to successfully influence the Alzheimer's disease due to new medications showing an effect on the deceleration of the disease in its early stage. This has an enormous impact on the quality of life of all patients and additionally on the costs of the health care system (one month stay in a nursing home will amount up to approx. 4000 Euros).

What really is alarming is the fact that due to tight budgets only 2,5 % of the diseases are treated with new medications such as aricept, exelon, reminyl (these medications replace the already lost neurotransmitters in the brain) or akatinol (improves the function of damaged cells)! In the near future a combination of different compounds (e. g. ginkgo, ergobel, vitamin E), so-called cocktails could probably lead to further improvements.

Self-help groups for people suffering from Alzheimer's disease exist in many bigger cities. The contact addresses can be obtained from the general practitioner, the specialist or via the internet.