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Do you ever walk into a room and forget what you went in for? Forget the names of people or misplace your keys? Thankfully, that is no cause for concern and is common for people of all ages.

However, dementia affects 43,000 New Zealanders and their families. Dementia occurs as a result of physical changes in the structure of the brain, affecting memory, behaviour and emotions. Dementia normally gets worse over time and common signs include:

- Memory loss affecting skills at work
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks
- Language difficulties
- Disorientation
- Mood changes
- Repeatedly misplacing things and putting them in inappropriate places

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of Dementia. We don't know what causes it but contributing factors may include age, family history and environment. As the disease progresses, brain cells die and the brain shrinks. Plaques and tangles form in brain tissue which can stop messages moving between cells and preventing the brain from working efficiently.

Some medications are available which may slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease in mild to moderate cases. These include Donepezil (Aricept, Donezil), Rivastigmine (Exelon) & Galantamine (Reminyl). They work by enhancing a chemical in the brain called acetylcholine, thought to be in short supply in people with Dementia.

Donepezil is now available as a subsidised medicine on a prescription. It is prescribed to help with mental function and doing daily tasks. It is not a cure for Alzheimer's disease, but it may slow the progression of the disease.

Lifestyle changes may help prevent Dementia. Exercising your brain with puzzles like crosswords, sudoku or bridge can keep your brain active. Exercise for the whole body can be helpful too. Try fifteen minutes of aerobic exercise a day, as well as flexibility and balancing exercises.

Social contact has also been found to reduce the incidence of Dementia. Visit friends, join community groups, volunteer or visit social networking sites on the internet. Alzheimers New Zealand is a support group that helps many people and their families with Dementia.

Research has indicated that Dementia is often accompanied by nutritional deficiencies so maintaining a healthy diet with five servings of fruit and vegetables a day may be helpful to lower your risk of Dementia. Zinc may be particularly helpful and can be found in fish, nuts, seeds and spirulina. Low levels of vitamin B12 and B3 are also associated with Alzheimer's, both of these important vitamins are found in meat, poultry and fish. B3 is also in legumes, nuts and seeds. If your digestive system is not working efficiently, you may wish to consider taking supplements to ensure you absorb the levels you need. Reducing alcohol and not smoking is beneficial too.

If you or a family member suffers from Dementia or Alzheimers disease, come in to Ahuriri Pharmacy to have your questions answered. **Lynley from Alzheimers New Zealand will be in store from 10-12 noon on the 27 July.** Phone Peter on 835 7948 at Ahuriri Pharmacy to make your private appointment.