

Advances In: Treating Alzheimer's

By Renee Martin-Kratzer

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A Clearer Diagnosis

A new radioactive dye that highlights brain plaques may help doctors detect signs of Alzheimer's even before dementia has started. By injecting AV-45 into patients having PET scans, physicians can see if there are amyloid protein deposits, a key building block of plaques that form between brain nerve cells in Alzheimer's patients. Researchers are studying differences in the brains of healthy seniors and those with mild cognitive problems or full-blown Alzheimer's. The sooner doctors can make a definitive diagnosis, the sooner they can begin treatment to minimize the effects. To find a study, search for "AV-45" at clinicaltrials.gov. **Available: 2-3 years.**

Fit Bodies, Fit Minds

Early-stage Alzheimer's patients have a new incentive to get moving. A University of Kansas study found that patients who were fit had four times less brain shrinkage (meaning cell death) than those who were out of shape. The benefits of exercise, including changes in growth factors and in-

creased blood vessels and blood flow, may prevent brain cells from dying. Researchers suggest first-time exercisers begin with a 15- to 30-minute walk three times a week.

Brain-Saving Drugs

Researchers are attacking Alzheimer's on different fronts. Three promising new drugs could be available in 5 to 10 years.

- **Exebryl-1** seems to dissolve both of the trouble spots of the disease: the amyloid deposits that lead to plaques, as well as the tau protein tangles that can damage or kill nerve cells. Mice given the drug had 40 percent fewer plaques compared with the placebo group, and their maze memory scores improved by 68 percent.

- **Dimebon**, which works by boosting brain cell energy, improved symptoms in all 89 patients, according to a study in the *Lancet*. Dimebon takers functioned better and scored higher on memory and reasoning tests than did the 93 participants taking a placebo.

- **Rember**. In a 321-person trial by British and Singaporean researchers, the drug attacked the protein tangles and slowed the progress of Alzheimer's by 81 percent.

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