Your official source for news on all Project FRONTIER and Cochran County Aging Study Activities

Alzheimer’s Disease Facts

Among the different kinds of dementia, Alzheimer’s disease (AD) is the most common and the most well-known. While it can affect younger people (early-onset AD), the number one risk factor for Alzheimer’s is age. It strikes 10% of people age 65 and older and 50% of people age 85 and older. In most cases, the symptom that is noticed first is problems with short-term memory. As the disease progresses, it touches every part of the person’s life, including memory, mood, and the ability to function normally and take care of oneself. While there is no cure for Alzheimer’s, there are medications available that can slow down its progression.

Normal
- Forgetting names of acquaintances
- Forgetting something every once in a while
- Getting confused or lost in a new place
- Forgetting where you put something

Not Normal
- Forgetting names of close friends or family
- Consistent problem that affects everyday life
- Getting confused or lost in places you know well
- Putting things in places that don’t make sense (like keys in the fridge)

Useful Resources:
- Alzheimer’s Association
  (800) 272-3900
- Area Agencies on Aging
  (800) 252-9240
- TTUHSC Department of Neurology
  (806) 743-2391

Where can I go for help?

If you are worried about changes in your memory and thinking, you should...

Talk to your health care provider. Sometimes these changes can be caused by other physical or mental health problems, like thyroid conditions or depression. Your health care provider can help you figure out if this is the case for you.

Get referred for a full assessment. This would include a neurological exam, blood draw, MRI, questions about your medical and family history, informant report from someone who knows you well, and testing of your memory and thinking.

Trust your instincts! There is no cure for Alzheimer’s disease, but you can slow down its progression with early diagnosis and treatment.
Spotlight on Projects:

**Texas Alzheimer’s Research Consortium**

Alzheimer’s disease is an increasingly common and devastating presence in households and communities across America. As prevalence and cost of care continue to rise, a better understanding of how this disease develops and progresses has become crucial. This was the charge given to the Texas Alzheimer’s Research Consortium (TARC) when it was created in 2005. The TARC and Project FRONTIER/CCAS have now entered a partnership to expand this research to rural-dwelling Mexican Americans.

“Project FRONTIER was asked to assist in enrollment of Mexican Americans owing to its existing commitment to understanding how memory and thinking changes among all rural Texans,” says Dr. Sid O’Bryant, the lead researcher for both Project FRONTIER and the TTUHSC site of the TARC. “Our study will enable the TARC to begin explicitly studying how Alzheimer’s disease impacts rural West Texans. We are very proud to have been asked by the TARC to help in this very important study.”

Mexican-American Project FRONTIER/CCAS participants who meet the TARC eligibility requirements will be invited to complete another blood draw (non-fasting), interview, and set of memory and thinking tests. These participants will also be seen every year, giving researchers the ability to closely track changes and their potential causes over time.

Updates on the Research:

Project FRONTIER continues to grow by leaps and bounds. We are now one of the largest and most comprehensive research studies ever to seek to understand rural health. Findings from this study have been presented at local, national, and even international research meetings. In addition to being asked to assist the Texas Alzheimer’s Research Consortium, we are also in the process of expanding our study to Bailey County.

Another new development is our recent focus on the impact of elements in our drinking water and how this impacts our health. This work is still very early; however, we are finding very important things, including how long-term low-level arsenic exposure (common in drinking water supplies across the United States) may have a bad impact on health and how selenium in the water may have a good impact on health.

We plan to continue expanding the research goals of the study to fit the needs and wishes of the community. A new finding from the TARC that made national and international headlines recently was our publication of a first-step towards a blood test for Alzheimer’s disease. We are in the process of working to see how this test might be able to detect mild changes in memory and thinking among people who have participated in Project FRONTIER as well. As always, please feel free to contact me if you ever have any questions.

What’s Being Done With The Data?

**Some recent and upcoming publications and presentations:**

- Texas Public Health Journal: “Physical activity is associated with cognitive and affective status among rural-dwelling women: A Project FRONTIER Study”
- Southwestern Psychological Association: “The differential impact of depressive symptom clusters on cognition in a rural multi-ethnic cohort: A Project FRONTIER Study”

**Data Points...**

- More than 25% of Project FRONTIER/CCAS participants report some kind of problem with their memory or thinking.
- 20% of these participants say the problem interferes with their day-to-day functioning.
We want to send a special thank you out to the volunteers who have helped with our 2010 BINGO Nights:

- The Cities of Whiteface and Morton
- St. Ann’s Catholic Church
- Jason Lemaster, Amy Crumley, Katie Liston, Annette Boles, and the rest of the Garrison Institute on Aging
Recent community events and presentations:
- Aug. 25: Alzheimer’s disease presentation at the Seniors’ Potluck in Bovina
- Oct. 22: Parmer Medical Center Grand Opening
- Oct. 27: Alzheimer’s disease presentation at Senior Meals in Bovina
- Nov. 8: Depression presentation at Senior Meals in Friona
**Spotlight on People:**  
*Community Advisory Boards*

Some of the people most important to the success of Project FRONTIER/CCAS are our Community Advisory Boards. These men and women are often some of our first contacts in new study counties and have the very important role of being the voice of the community. The Project FRONTIER/CCAS research team ask for their thoughts and advice on everything from recruitment strategies, community events, and new research projects. The advisory boards also provide feedback on how the project is progressing and being accepted in each community, as well as any issues that come up.

The main responsibility for an advisory board member is to attend the quarterly advisory board meetings. These meetings are typically held on the last Thursday of March, June, and September. At these meetings, the boards are given updates on the current status of Project FRONTIER/CCAS in their counties and offer their input. In December, the research team sponsors an appreciation dinner in each community for the advisory board members and their families. Apart from the meetings, an advisory board member’s other responsibility is to be an advocate for the research in the community. The support Project FRONTIER/CCAS has received from its Community Advisory Boards has been vital to the success of the study.

“Because this is a community-based participatory research project, the Community Advisory Boards play a vital role and are great assets for Project FRONTIER,” says Cathy Hudson, the study’s Project Coordinator. “The members serve as the eyes, ears, and voice of their respective communities, and there is no way that this project would be the success that it is without their input and engagement. It is a joy and privilege to work with the advisory boards and to have them as our partners.”

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**Cochran Co. Board:**  
- Betty Akin  
- Ernestine Clevenger  
- Lettie Roberts  
- Pat Elmore  
- Pattie Clayton  
- Peggy Hyman  
- Ray & Nancy Luper  
- Ray & Bennie O’Brien  
- Reynalda Alvarado  
- Shirley Sears  
- Vivian Nehbut

**Parmer Co. Board:**  
- Chris Alexander  
- Heidi Eichenauer  
- J.B. Douglas  
- Jim & Kay Swafford  
- John Blackwell  
- Kenny Austin  
- Lance Gatlin  
- Mary Johnston  
- Nancy Davis  
- Nikki Brister  
- Rhonda Wilkins  
- Susie Spring

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**We always welcome new members to the Community Advisory Boards! If you are interested, please contact your county’s coordinator to get the next meeting date.**

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**Community Perspective:**  
*Nikki Brister, Administrator for Prairie Acres Nursing Home (Friona)*

In my experience over the last 2 years as Administrator of Prairie Acres, the majority of our long-term admissions have been suffering from Alzheimer’s or a related dementia. I have seen family members suffering from guilt because they could no longer provide the needed care for their loved one. I think the most important thing for people to know is that it is okay to grieve for the loss of your loved one as you knew them, even though they are still alive. This disease robs the person of who they were because of the damage it does to the brain. I would tell caregivers and loved ones to join the journey of the person with Alzheimer’s. What I mean by that is, they are looking at the world in a different way and their reality is not what we see. In order to make the most of your time together, join their journey by accepting what they tell you as fact. It is the truth to them and to argue or try to re-orient them to your reality causes frustration and anger for them.

*In regard to available resources* Our staff are trained in dealing with memory loss, and we have a closed unit, Opal Ridge, for those who do not function well in the general population of the nursing facility. I also recommend that caregivers and loved ones of those suffering with Alzheimer’s read *The 36-Hour Day.*
Healthy tip:
Steps You Can Take to Improve Your Memory

Many people, both young and old, complain about their memory at some point. Here are some easy things you can do to help improve your memory...

1: Exercise your mind. Doing crossword puzzles may be the first thing that comes to mind here, but anything that makes the mind work is helpful. One of the best things you can do is take up a new hobby or add something new to your routine. This creates new connections in the brain, which can help keep it active and healthy.

2: Make healthy choices. Recent research found that people who walked just 6-9 miles a week showed less of the changes in the brain that are associated with memory loss. Regular physical activity and healthy eating habits also help prevent and control some of the health problems known to increase the risk of Alzheimer’s, like diabetes.

3: Check for triggers. Do you notice that you have more memory problems right before a big decision or after a fight with a family member? Or maybe you struggle more during the week than on the weekend, when you're more relaxed. If so, your forgetfulness may be due to distraction and stress. Even if you can’t get rid of all the stressors in your life, you can learn to be better prepared for them when they hit.

4: Learn a few tricks. There are a lot of little things you can do to help you remember better. One option is to get everything down on paper - make lists, keep a calendar, leave yourself reminder notes. Repetition and grouping things together while you’re learning them can also help you remember them better.

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Project FRONTIER/CCAS is committed to being involved with and responsive to the needs of our study site communities. If there is a community event that we should attend or you would like a presentation given to your business or organization, please contact your county’s study coordinator.

Project FRONTIER & Cochran County Aging Study Personnel:

**Central Staff:**
- Principal Investigator: Dr. Sid O’Bryant
- Outreach Coordinator: Vicki Ramirez
- Other Research Staff: Kris Hargrave, Dr. Gordon Gong, Sravan Mattevada
- Project Coordinator: Cathy Hudson
- Training Coordinator: Erin Braddock

**Community Staff:**
- **Cochran County:** Lousinda Anguiano (Call: 806-893-3891) Bennie O’Brien
- **Parmer County:** Rosemary McCallum (Call: 806-225-7477) Tabitha Franklin
- **Bailey County:** Marina Piña

In our next issue...
Spring/Summer 2011
Depression and Anxiety - Coping in Rural Areas

For more information about Project FRONTIER/CCAS, please call us at 806-743-5601.