

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple A Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment where we give you news and information that you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest this morning is Kendra Lund. She is the program manager at the Fergus Falls office of the Minnesota/North Dakota chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. Good morning, Kendra.

Kendra Lund: Hello.

Katie Johnson: Thank you for joining us today. We're here to talk about the upcoming Living Well Series, and that's a series that Lake Region Healthcare hosts the third Monday of every month, so it's coming up next Monday, March 20th, and our topic is dementia versus aging, how to tell the difference. What a great and timely topic. I appreciate that you're willing to be our speaker for that event and give us a little preview of what you'll be talking about. First, let's tell our listeners a little bit about who you are and your job at the Alzheimer's Association.

Kendra Lund: Well, I'm originally from around the area, been living in this community for most of my life, graduated from Moorhead State with a degree in social work, and I've been working in that field for about the last 15 years.

Katie Johnson: When we talk about dementia and aging and how to tell the difference, I think it's good to start with just some framework. What is dementia? How is it defined?

Kendra Lund: Dementia really affects the range of thinking and abilities and can affect things such as thoughts and behaviors. Dementia really just affects how your neurons transmit signals from one neuron to the other. As it progresses, it can actually continue to break down even the basic functionings such as walking and speaking, and then into the later stages, it can affect basic functioning like breathing and even swallowing.

Katie Johnson: How is that different than the general effects of aging on the brain?

Kendra Lund: Dementia is not normal aging, it's not something that everyone gets. Our bodies age, and with that, our brain ages. It's not normal to have the thinking that you can't remember things. It's pretty typical that someone forgets things time to time, but not being able to remember it eventually, that's when it's problematic.

Katie Johnson: Okay, so give us some examples that can help us understand the difference between dementia and aging as we think about either ourselves or people that we know.

Kendra Lund: Yeah, for sure. Normal aging really doesn't ... Memory problems really affect your daily life, so if you forget things from time to time, that's okay, but it's that it's constantly causing problems and really impacting your life. Making decisions that aren't really of sound judgment, having difficulty doing familiar tasks, not being able to do things that you do every day like brush your teeth, brush your hair, make

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decisions about what to wear based on the temperature outside, things like that, and losing things not having the ability to retrace steps. I can lose my keys, but I can usually say, "Where did I have them last?" Then I can go back to where I was and figure it out from there. An individual with dementia doesn't have that ability to say where I had them last, that information is often gone, the ability to pull it back. Then often we see withdrawal from work or social activities, really changes that aren't what the person used to be before. Major changes are a warning sign.

Katie Johnson: At what point, when you start to see warning signs for things like this, is it time to see a doctor?

Kendra Lund: Well, I think at the beginning when things are kind of starting to disrupt the life would be the best turning point. There are several things that can be happening with the body that can mimic dementia, and often, if those things are treated, they can be reversed, so really trying to get to the root of what's going on. You may be living with these symptoms and not actually have dementia, so we don't want individuals going about thinking they have dementia and their memory's just going when it could be something pretty simple to reverse. Things like side effects of medication, dehydration, lack of vitamins and poor nutrition, all of those things are pretty common in the elderly population yet they're reversible. To just say they're dementia is often causing undue stress.

Katie Johnson: How about prevention? Is there anything that we can do to actually prevent dementia?

Kendra Lund: Well, there is no actual cure for dementia and there is no actual thing that I can do that says, "Eat this, or do this exercise, and you won't get dementia." There's no guarantee for that right now. They do have scientific research that shows your heart health and your brain health are connected, and so anything that you can do that would be heart healthy, strong exercise, social engagement, all of that helps your brain stay healthy and helps your heart stay healthy. There's a big connection between blood flow, and so if your heart is pumping and your brain is getting the right amount of blood, then your heart is going to help keep that brain healthy.

Katie Johnson: My next question was if there are some tips for coping with normal aging of the brain, but I think it's important to note that coping might involve that exercise as well.

Kendra Lund: Yeah, so if you're doing things like keeping your brain healthy, trying to increase those interactions, you're going to have a healthier brain, you're probably not going to see as much of those warning signs come out or those red flags. Typically, if you're in the normal brain health category, your brain will age, but, typically, we can add normal coping skills like using post-its and reminders and lists and all the technology that we have nowadays to deal with that. Those are often enough to help someone who is in that normal category.

Katie Johnson: I certainly use my share of post-it notes. If a person continues to notice troubling

changes, either in themselves or in a loved one, which is probably, I'm guessing, where the first warning signs are usually noticed by a loved one, what do you recommend that they take as first steps?

Kendra Lund: We really recommend schedule an appointment with your physician. Start with your primary care physician because they're going to know your baseline better. Start there and just say, "Hey, we have these concerns." Keeping a log is really helpful to know where your baseline is. Often, providers don't have a lot of in-room time with their patients, just given the demands, and if you can keep a log, they're going to get the most accurate information about what's really going on. Start there, and if there's some red flags with that provider, then you can go on to the more specialists. Really, just get it checked out, even if you're not sure what's going on, let the healthcare provider make that decision.

Katie Johnson: How about for those who do have a diagnosis, what kind of resources do you provide at the Alzheimer's Association for patients and their families?

Kendra Lund: The Alzheimer's Association provides a couple different services. We do provide basic education to communities and professionals, so anyone working with an individual with Alzheimer's or some kind of dementia, we help them care for those individuals. Also, on the other side, we do individual and family care planning. If you are caring for someone, there's a gamut full of resources, and depending upon their needs, they're all a little bit different. We sit down with families and we pull in anyone from the primary care partner to the individual's family, adult kids, anyone who's really involved in that care planning process, and just make sure they have all the resources that they need to be helpful care providers and be supportive for that individual.

Katie Johnson: That is certainly a great service that we're fortunate to have here. I'd like you to just give the opportunity to let people know how they can reach out to you for those types of services, where to find you, the best contact information for you.

Kendra Lund: Yeah, the best contact information is simply a phone call. The local office number is 998-3603, or we have a help line number that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and that number is 1-800-272-3900. That's, again, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Katie Johnson: Great resources, and, of course, we want to invite everyone to come out and hear you speak more in-depth on this topic at our Living Well Series Monday night, March 20th in the clinic lobby here at 111 West Vernon in Fergus Falls, that will start at 5:30 on Monday evening and conclude by 7:00. We ask that people RSVP if they're able to. If you're able to RSVP, give us a phone call either at 736-8699 or an email to livingwell@lrhc.org. We certainly don't want to discourage you from attending if you don't RSVP. If it comes to be Monday evening and you decide you can attend, just swing into the clinic lobby and join us. We would love to have you there. I'm sure that Kendra will have time for some Q and A and answer your individual questions as well. Anything else you'd like to add, Kendra?

Kendra Lund: No, just looking forward to the event and looking forward to getting some education out to the community.

Katie Johnson: Kendra Lund, the program manager at the Fergus Falls office of the Minnesota/North Dakota chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, who will be our featured speaker at the Living Well Series Monday night, March 20th in the clinic lobby. Kendra and Katie, reminding you this morning there is so much to do here, stay healthy for it. Have a great day.