“You’re listening to Brain Talk, from the Johns Hopkins Brain Science Institute.”

Dr. McKhann: “This is a disease of aging, if you look at 65 year olds, you’ll find maybe 3-5% of the population. Get up around 85 and 90, you’re talking 35 or 40% of the population, you’re talking enormous #’s of people.”

Dale: “Doctor Guy McKhann is a professor of neurology at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. He and his wife, Dr. Marilyn Albert, specialize in the fields of aging and Alzheimer’s disease.

Today on Brain Talk: the debilitating effects of Alzheimer’s disease and how we’re finding ways to treat it.

‘The first major sign of the disease’, says Dr. Albert, ‘is when an individual has trouble retaining new information’.

Dr. Albert: “So people have trouble multi-tasking, doing things that require switching from one thing to another. They begin to have trouble with language, finding the words to say what they want to say, they begin to have trouble finding their way around a familiar environment. So over time, all mental abilities become affected.”

Dr. McKhann: “In the advanced stages of the disease it is absolutely devastating, they don’t know their children, they don’t remember where they are. When you see people who you knew before, who were perfectly capable people, it’s one of the real tragedies to see people, and they can look fine.”

Dale: “Alzheimer is the name of the doctor who identified the two major elements of the illness in 1906. One is called tangles, made of a protein called tau (pronounced like tao). The other is amyloid plaques. Recently, scientists discovered that someone can have both these elements and not necessarily get Alzheimer disease.

Dr. Albert: “So we now know that people can be cognitively normal and have that pathology in the brain. And its not until it begins to affect the nerve cells and the nerve cells start to die that you’d begin to develop the symptoms.”

Dale: “Drug treatment is currently focused on early intervention, scientist hope to get a greater understanding of the developing stages of the disease.

Dr. Albert: “I mean if you take the idea of heart disease, we don’t wait until you develop congestive heart failure to treat you. We treat you when you have high cholesterol and you have high blood pressure, or diabetes, we know that those are risks for subsequent disease and that same idea is what we now have in the field of Alzheimer’s disease.”

Dale: “Drugs have failed to stop the plaques from building up. So now the focus is on the tau tangles, and on other areas such as brain inflammation.”
Dr. McKhann: “To me that's an important step. My guess is a little bit like how you treat other diseases like cancer. You don't treat cancer with only one drug. You go at three or four different mechanisms in cancer, and most people take 2 or 3 drugs. I think we're going to wind up with that too.

Dale: “Both doctors are hopeful that treatment will eventually be found.

Dr. Albert: “If you think of all the people with dementia, about 70% of them have Alzheimer's disease, so that's why we're working so hard to find better treatments. And we're lucky in the sense that the pharmaceuticals companies are working on this, because if it wasn't a common disease, then even though it's a terrible disease, no one would be trying to find better treatments.”

Dale: “To learn more about Dr. Albert and Dr. McKhann's research on Alzheimer's and aging, log on to brainscienceinstitute.org. I'm Dale Connelly and this is Brain Talk, from Johns Hopkins University.

“Dementia Detective: Marilyn Albert” an article about Dr. Albert

Alzheimer's Disease Research Center
The overarching goal of the Center is to accelerate the discovery of new treatments that are directed at the basic mechanisms of disease, and to hasten the time when effective treatments for AD and related disorders become a reality.

Alzheimer's Association
The Alzheimer's Association is the world's leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support and research.

ADEAR
The U.S. Congress created the Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center in 1990 to “compile, archive, and disseminate information concerning Alzheimer's disease” for health professionals, people with AD and their families, and the public.

“Keep Your Brain Young” a book by Dr. Albert and Dr. McKhann
Available on Amazon.com

http://www.brainscienceinstitute.org