

Mayo Clinic Podcast - Jonathan Graff Radford, M.D. - Angela ...

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SPEAKERS

Dr. Sanj Kakar, Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford, Narrator, Angela Lunde

- D** Dr. Sanj Kakar 00:02
Welcome, everyone to Mayo Clinic Q&A. I'm Dr. Sanj Kakar. If you've ever misplaced your keys, or had trouble recalling a neighbor's name, you may wonder is this typical aging or something worse. When it comes to Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, what is actually happening to the brain, and how do you keep it healthy? A new edition of a Mayo Clinic book aims to answer these questions and much more. The second edition of Mayo Clinic on Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias, a guide for people with dementia and those who care for them is now available. Here to discuss this are co-editors of the book, Mayo Clinic behavioral neurologist, Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford and Alzheimer's disease researcher, Angela Lunde. Thanks so much for joining us today, and welcome to the program.
- D** Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford 00:45
Thanks so much for having us.
- D** Dr. Sanj Kakar 00:47
And congratulations on this book. This is really exciting. Dr. Graff-Radford, first of all I'd like to sort of talk to you about what's normal in terms of the aging process and the way our brain sort of develops as we go through that.
- A** Angela Lunde 00:47
Thank you.
- D** Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford 00:48
This is a question we get in the behavioral neurology clinic every day. So, what are the typical changes the

This is a question we get in the behavioral neurology clinic every day. So, what are the typical changes the brain undergoes with aging. And like any part of our body, the brain does change as we age, it actually very gradually shrinks. And this is associated with a slowing down of our thinking and occasional misplacing of your keys or forgetting someone's names. But when these problems become more regular or start to interfere with our ability to function in an independent way, that's when we need to be more concerned.

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Dr. Sanj Kakar 01:39

And is there a typical age where you see that happening?

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Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford 01:43

Most commonly, we start to see this in the 70s, and 80s. But we do follow a number of people who develop these problems at younger ages, and that's something we specialize at Mayo Clinic as well.

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Dr. Sanj Kakar 01:56

As you know, many people use the words dementia and Alzheimer's disease to mean the same thing. Are they the same thing?

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Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford 02:04

They're not the same thing. So, dementia is a nonspecific term that refers to a change in your thinking abilities that interferes with your ability to function independently. So, it may interfere with your ability to balance a checkbook, prepare a meal, or live by yourself. In contrast, Alzheimer's disease is a specific disease due to a buildup of toxic proteins in the brain. That is the most common form of dementia, but there's other forms of dementia as well.

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Dr. Sanj Kakar 02:37

Now we see all the time advertisements about how we can sort of train our brain or make it better as we get older to prevent this from happening. Any thoughts about this and decreasing our risk of dementia?

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Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford 02:51

This is an exciting area of science that's really blossomed over the last 10 years. We know a lot more about the lifestyles that are associated with decreasing our risk of developing dementia. The ones that have been studied the best are certain diets. So, a heart healthy diet like a Mediterranean type diet, which includes eating fish regularly, eating lots of olive oil, fruits, vegetables and nuts, has been associated with decreasing your risk of dementia. Also, cardiovascular exercise, getting your heart rate up while you're exercising, and they recommend you do about 150 minutes of that a week. That has also been associated with decreasing your risk of getting dementia. And just this year, Lancet published 12 lifestyle behaviors that could substantially reduce the world's dementia factor risk by up to 40% if we adopt them. And included in that are things like vascular risk factors as well.

D Dr. Sanj Kakar 03:55

What about these puzzles or ways to stimulate your brain to stay sharp? Any truth behind that?

D Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford 04:02

There's some preliminary evidence that staying cognitively active and socially engaged is associated with reducing your risk of developing dementia. There's actually ongoing studies right now to see if certain cognitive activities can really reduce your risk. But what we recommend is that if you enjoy doing them you should do them. But the science isn't quite there to broadly recommend them for everyone yet.

D Dr. Sanj Kakar 04:30

You must be particularly excited about this second edition of this book. Can you tell us what's new in the book?

D Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford 04:36

The second edition really includes a lot more personal stories of our patients living with dementia and their care partners. We learn a lot from people who are undergoing the journey. And that's something I've learned in the clinic day in day out taking care of them is that they teach me as much as I teach them. And so, their stories are really valuable information for people reading this book about what it's like. We also include in this book, not only information on Alzheimer's disease but other forms of dementia as well, including Lewy body dementia, frontotemporal dementia. And we've also address young onset Alzheimer's disease, which is something we see quite a bit in our behavioral neurology clinic. And that's people who get Alzheimer's under the age 65. And they have different problems than people who get Alzheimer's disease when they're older.

D Dr. Sanj Kakar 05:34

You alluded to obviously different forms of dementia. And we know, for example, in the sports industry with head injuries, especially in younger people that can lead to problems down the road. Is that something that you've also tackled in this book?

D Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford 05:47

Yeah. We do talk about what you've been reading about it in the news, which is something called chronic traumatic encephalopathy. And this is a type of dementia that's due to repeated head injury. We typically see this in high level athletes like professional football players and boxers. And so, it's something that's covered in this book as well.

D Dr. Sanj Kakar 06:09

Angela, as Dr. Graff-Radford mentioned in this book, what's new is the personal perspective. Can you tell us why you felt that was important and some of the highlights that you've learned that you'd like to share with us today?

A

Angela Lunde 06:23

As Dr. Graff-Radford mentioned, you know, there's really no better way for us to understand dementia than from those who are experiencing it firsthand. And I know in my 20 years of being in this role, you know, my best mentors and teachers and guides have been persons living with dementia as well as their care partners. Even when we were first conceptualizing this book, one of the things that we did was we brought together persons living with dementia and care partners and asked them, what do they want in this book, what's important to them, what do they want to see. So, we really wanted those that are most impacted to greatly influence what it was that we decided to put into this book. And you know, the book includes clear up-to-date information about healthy aging and about dementia. It really tells you what's going on in the brain and in clear ways that I think we can all understand. But you also get to meet an individual that I know, a great friend named Mike who's living with Lewy body dementia. You get to meet Rosalie who's a care partner that I've known now for over a decade. You get to meet a group of men who call themselves the guy's, and this is a group of men who meet, and have met now for a couple of years, every single month in a local cafeteria, or a local cafe up in the Minneapolis area. And these are the real people behind the disease. You hear their stories through their own experiences. And it's these stories, right? It's the stories that help us feel understood. They validate our own experience. They help us feel connected and let us know that we are not alone. So, that was a really important component that we wanted to give to this book.

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Dr. Sanj Kakar 08:19

As you said, medicine is an art form. And we're always learning not only from our patients, but as you said, their caregivers. And so, with through your research, what are sort of some of the misconceptions or stigma that you've learned about and would like to address with this?

A

Angela Lunde 08:36

One of the things that I've done for years now is when I go out and I talk to groups, I'll ask them the question, when you hear the word dementia what words or images come to your mind. And you know, I usually hear things that that center on the ideas of loss and decline and deficits, getting old, and much of our view of dementia comes from the media, the pictures that we see out there, and much of how we understand dementia comes from the medical model. It comes from healthcare professionals. And because of that, much of what we understand about dementia is focused on what's wrong, what's not working what declines and deficits people experience. And all of that shapes our perspective and our view of dementia. You know, and it's actually the job of healthcare to focus on what's wrong and figure out how they can help in that way. So, you know, we need that. But the problem with, you know, the medical way we've come to understand dementia, the problem with how media sometimes portrays this disease, is it gives us a very one-sided view. So, what the book does is it gives us an opportunity to really explore stigma misconceptions related to dementia. And a few examples around these misconceptions that are addressed in the book, the misconception that people can no longer contribute in meaningful ways because they have dementia, the misconception that that those with dementia can no longer need to learn new things,

or that everybody with dementia is all the same. The reality is that every individual with dementia is unique, they will experience dementia in their own way. So, the book helps to see beyond the deficits, to see beyond the disease, and helps uncover the strengths as well as the people living with these diseases.

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Dr. Sanj Kakar 10:45

I can just tell the way you're speaking how this has really touched you and from learning from the patients and their families. Can you explain how the COVID 19 pandemic may have affected some of the care patients have received and with their loved ones in terms of access to care and some of the misnomers associated with that?

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Angela Lunde 11:05

Remember, you know, knowing that our best teachers are those who are living with the disease. And what I've heard across the globe from people living with dementia as it relates to the pandemic, is they'll say things like people now know what we've been going through all along, right? Because people living with dementia have always felt a loss of connection. They've lost the ability to do the things that they've enjoyed. And they've had a sense of isolation. So, in some regards, I think those living with dementia now feel better understood. And what it does for us I think, is it provides an opportunity to have greater empathy. The pandemic, because it's impacted all of us across the globe, it's also then provided some benefit to those living with dementia and care partners, because I think there's more focus on innovative ways to connect. We now have support groups that are available virtually which means no matter where people are, there's no longer issues with regards to accessibility such as transportation. Health care visits are also now done online which can be you know, has pros and cons. But for many caring for somebody with dementia, it can provide a great convenience. And we know there are definite downsides for all of us, including those impacted by dementia. Some of the day programs that they've come to depend on for care partners for respite and for those living with dementia it's been a connection for them. There's been a disruption in their daily routines, as we've heard about the ability for people to visit loved ones who are in care communities have been profoundly affected. So, there's lots of things we've learned, I think, about people impacted by dementia through this. And we do see both the pros, some of the pros, and of course definitely the profound ways that this disease has impacted dementia and those living with it.

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Dr. Sanj Kakar 13:12

Dr. Graff Radford, what have you noticed in the clinical arena, how COVID-19 has affected care for patients with dementia?

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Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford 13:20

COVID-19 has really affected all of us, but particularly those with dementia. And depending on the level of severity of the dementia, they may not understand things like social distancing and masking. So, it's incredibly important that you realize you're doing those things, because you're protecting your loved ones. It's important we've heard from our patients to stay connected, as Angela mentioned. And so, that may mean things like writing letters regularly to your loved ones with dementia, getting on the phone with them regularly, or if they're comfortable with technology, doing video visits. And these are some of the techniques that our patients have used to stay in touch when physical contact is not as readily possible.

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Dr. Sanj Kakar 14:08

What I love about this book is how the both of you have brought different perspectives together to come together in a sort of symbiotic way. Angela, I'd like to ask you first, what's the one message you'd like people to take away from this book?

A

Angela Lunde 14:20

The book doesn't sugarcoat things. It's an honest guide full of information about dementia and about healthy aging. But alongside dementia, the book also shows that new hope can be cultivated. Mike, who I spoke about earlier, tells us that even alongside this disease there is a life, and there is life worth living after a diagnosis. And Rosalie, the care partner that I mentioned earlier, teaches us that new strengths can be cultivated as a part of this experience. She specifically talks about patience, resilience, gratitude, and even humor. So, that's the one takeaway I hope people get is we get to see this from the whole perspective.

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Dr. Sanj Kakar 15:10

Dr. Graff-Radford, your thoughts on the final takeaway from this book?

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Dr. Jonathan Graff-Radford 15:15

I would echo Angela's sentiment that there is hope for our patients living with dementia and their care partners. Scientists continue to learn every day about when the disease starts, how it's progressing, what treatments are on the horizon, and as we mentioned earlier, there are lifestyles that can reduce your risk of developing dementia. So, we're optimistic about the future.

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Dr. Sanj Kakar 15:45

Anything else Angela, Jonathan you'd like to add?

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Angela Lunde 15:48

A final thing I would share as well is there's a fair, there's a good section of this book that's for those living with the disease to talk about the disease through the lens of wellness. And there's a good section of this book for caregivers that talks about wellness as well. So, it's really a guide on understanding the disease as well as a path to wellness.

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Dr. Sanj Kakar 16:14

Our thanks to Jonathan Graff-Radford and Angela Lunde, co-editors of the second edition of Mayo Clinic's Book on Alzheimer's Disease and Other dementias. Thank you so much for joining us today.



Narrator 16:24

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