



David Suzuki

Suzuki probes Nature of Alzheimer's disease

BY MICHAEL KORB © ZAP2IT

There are few words uglier or more horrifying in the English language than "Alzheimer's." It's a disease that robs us of almost everything. But there is hope.

"Untangling Alzheimer's," a one-hour investigation of one of the great enigmas facing medical science, airs at 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 14, on CBC Television's *The Nature of Things*.

This powerful and eye-opening episode is driven by host David Suzuki's journey to understand the science of Alzheimer's and the surprising new insights into its cause. It also features a rare glimpse into Suzuki's personal life and family history. His mother, aunt and two uncles died of the disease. And at 77, he wonders just what his chances are of getting it.

"(It's) the sixth leading killer disease in North America and the only one that can't be stopped, slowed or treated," says Suzuki. "We don't even know what causes it."

Worse, it's the only leading cause of death that is on the rise — and not simply because the baby boomers are getting older. Studies show that the increase is absolute across all age groups, and death rates continue to climb. With a new case developing every 69 seconds, scientists now speak of the Alzheimer's epidemic.

To help us all understand just what someone with the disease goes through, Suzuki takes what is called the Virtual Dementia Tour, where he wears a variety of items — insoles, glasses, earphones that play auditory stimuli — that simulate the experience of someone with dementia. In the scene, he is brought to tears thinking about what his mother went through.

But surprising new theories about the roots of Alzheimer's may now be untangling the mystery. And some fascinating treatments seem to hold hope.

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