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Description
The Ohio State University Medical Center has found a new approach to helping those diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Disease by using pacemakers that send electrical signals deep into the brain and increasing connectivity with areas that are still healthy.

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MLA
As we mentioned, there is news tonight on Alzheimer’s and new numbers paint a pretty stunning picture of what we’re already facing here. That is that one in three Americans over 65 dies with Alzheimer’s or some form of dementia. In total, nearly five and a half million Americans are living with it. That’s up 39% in just the past decade. Now in the meantime, research continues, including thankfully an occasional breakthrough. Our report from NBC’s Tom Costello.

TOM COSTELLO, reporting:
At the Ohio State University Med Center, a new approach to cutting through the fog of Alzheimer’s.

MAN: It’s going to be nice and loud. We’ll listen to your brain cells.

COSTELLO: Surgeons have fitted a patient with two pacemakers, the wires reaching deep into her brain. The patient isn't 78 year-old Joe Jester or his wife Peggy. It's their 57 year-old daughter Kathy, struggling with early onset Alzheimer’s.

JOE JESTER: It's sad for Peggy and I to-- to go through this with our daughter, you know especially when it should be us and not her.

KATHY JESTER: Frustration sometimes.

COSTELLO: Frustration that you can't remember?


COSTELLO: Because she's young, doctors hope the pacemaker can give Kathy a longer, better quality of life. Just like a heart pacemaker it fits right underneath the skin. Doctors then manipulate the signal to regulate the brain's electrical activity. The signals push through the areas of the brain damaged by Alzheimer’s connecting with areas that are still healthy.

DR. ALI REZAI (Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center): As the brain gets more gummed up with Alzheimer’s, there is less connectivity-- less functioning of the different parts of the brain and our goal is to increase the connectivity and functioning of the brain.

COSTELLO: For years a similar treatment has helped calm brain activity in Parkinson’s patients, but Kathy is the first Alzheimer’s patient.
MAN: Ready?
K. JESTER: Ready?
MAN: Go.
COSTELLO: It's no cure, but already doctors are seeing a big improvement in her ability to concentrate and solve problems.
MAN: Speedy today.
K. JESTER: I'm getting smarter.
COSTELLO: Why did you volunteer so quickly?
K. JESTER: Because I wanted to be on the cutting edge of the new stuff, new things. Somebody has to do it.
COSTELLO: Cutting edge and just maybe turning the first page on Alzheimer’s. Tom Costello, NBC News, Columbus, Ohio.