

## Stages of Dementia

Dementia is a disease of the brain. It causes changes in:

- Memory
- Language
- Problem solving
- Other thinking abilities that are severe enough to interfere with daily life

There are different types of dementia. Alzheimer's is the most common type.

Dementia can be described in terms of "stages." The stages explain how the disease affects someone's ability to do everyday activities. This can help you plan care for your loved one. It is important to know that while everyone with dementia will progress through these stages, not everyone will progress at the same rate or have the same symptoms.

### Mild Dementia: Early Stages

The person might still be able to do some things independently but may notice some memory changes. These include:

- Problems coming up with the right word or names of people they know.
- Trouble remembering new names.
- Losing or misplacing items.
- Struggling to organize or plan.

Family, friends, and co-workers might notice these memory changes. A doctor may be able to see problems with memory and thinking during an exam.

### How to Help

- Learn about dementia (see listed resources, or talk with a trusted doctor).
- Use memory coping strategies. These include writing down information or using large calendars.
- Think about the future. Dementia changes people's abilities to perform daily tasks and care for themselves.
  - Make the home safe.
  - Make daily routines and tasks simple for your loved one. Keep them involved.
  - Start making legal and financial plans. Think about creating power of attorney documents.
  - Talk about what matters most to your loved one. This will help you make care decisions for later.

### Moderate Dementia: Middle Stages

People in the middle stages of dementia have more noticeable symptoms. They might have trouble expressing themselves or doing tasks like bathing or dressing. They might also behave in ways you don't expect. They can get angry or suspicious of others. Other changes include:

- Changes with their mood or emotions.
- Trouble recalling details about themselves or recent events.

## How to Help

- Offer one or two options instead of many when making choices. Dementia can cause them to be overwhelmed by too many options.
- Try to create a calm space without too much noise or activity when they need to focus on something.
- Be sure they have glasses/magnifiers and good lighting if they can't see. If the person has trouble hearing, use hearing aids or sound amplifiers. Decrease background noise.
- If information needs to be repeated or the person needs to be reminded of something, gently do so. Don't call out that they forgot.
- **Avoid** arguing. Change the subject instead.
- Keep using memory aids and visual reminders around the house.
- The person might not be able to tell you how they feel or what they need. They might become anxious, restless, or agitated, instead. Offer things that the person might need if they seem upset.
- Talk to a doctor if the person starts acting different. It could be a sign of a health issue.

## Severe Dementia: Late Stages

People with severe dementia are unable to carry conversations with others. They can't respond to what is going on around them.

## How to Help

- They need a lot of help with daily tasks as they are unable to do them on their own. They may have trouble with bladder and bowel control. Most patients with severe dementia will need 24-hour care.
- Patients in this stage will not be able to tell you their feelings and needs. You will need to observe their mood or how they are acting.
- Approach your loved one slowly when helping with personal cares. Tell and/or show them what you plan to do before doing it. This will help prevent the person from becoming startled.
- Reassure and comfort. Even if they cannot engage with you, they still benefit from your presence and interaction.

## Resources

The Alzheimer's Association

**1-800-272-3900** or [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org).

To find out more about aging and living with disabilities, as well as caregiver resources, find your local Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). Find locations here:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/index.htm>.

To find resources in other areas, use Elder Locator:

**1-800-677-1116** or [www.eldercare.acl.gov/](http://www.eldercare.acl.gov/)

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 8/2024 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5262