

STAGES OF DEMENTIA

The stages of dementia described here are based on loss of abilities that are common in Alzheimer's disease. Different types of dementia may have different problems in the EARLY stages, but over time most types have many of the same challenges and issues. The most important factor to remember is that dementia affects each person differently, so caregivers must think about each person as an INDIVIDUAL.

Early Stage

- Progressive memory decline interferes with nearly all abilities
 - Problems remembering names, places
 - Loses and/or misplaces things
 - Difficulty planning and organizing
- Has problems with usual activities, like money management, driving, housekeeping, cooking
- Aware of problems but blame stress, other issues
- May try to compensate for problems with lists, memory aids
- Depression is common as person becomes aware of deficits
 - Overlapping depression can make memory problems worse
 - Treating depression with medication, other therapy will “restore” memory problems that are the result of depression

Middle Stage

- Disorientation and confusion increase over time, usually in the order listed below:
 - Time of day, month, season, year
 - Places, such as where they are, live now, were born
 - Persons, including family, close friends, caregivers who are well known to them
 - Things in the environment, like what common object are – like toothbrush, dentures, hearing aid
- Problems in daily activities and function occur
 - Willingness and ability to bathe
 - Grooming
 - Choosing among clothing
 - Dressing
 - Walking and mobility
 - Toileting
 - Using language to communicate needs

Understanding Changing Needs of Persons with Dementia

- Loss of ability to reason, to plan for safety, and communicate verbally contributes to behavioral symptoms
 - Frustration, anger, cursing, name-calling
 - Resistance to care, wandering, problems eating
- Communication becomes more and more difficult with loss of language
 - Families are challenged to provide care; reach out for help
 - Families may stop visiting due feeling stressed, unable to “reach” their loved one
- Middle stage may persist a long time, and involve many different types of behavior

Late Stage

- Don't recognize family members, or even their own image in a mirror
- No longer walk; have little purposeful activity
- Are often mute and may yell or scream spontaneously
- Forget how to eat, to swallow, and chew
 - Choking becomes a risk
 - Weight loss is common
- Incontinence is common (urine and bowel)
- Develop problems associated with immobility
 - Falls/fractures
 - Pneumonia
 - Pressure ulcers, skin breakdown due to incontinence
 - Urinary tract infections
 - Contractures
- Extensive assistance is needed with all daily activities and personal care
 - Person may eventually become completely dependent on caregivers
- Death often occurs as a result of complications of dementia: choking, pneumonia, falling