

Progression of Alzheimer's disease

This Help Sheet discusses the progression of Alzheimer's disease from the early stages to the final stages of advanced dementia.

People with Alzheimer's disease experience different challenges and changes at different times throughout the progression of the disease. No two people experience the same changes at the same time. Their abilities may change from day to day, or even within the same day. What is certain though, is that the person's abilities will deteriorate over time.

It can be very challenging for family members to deal with the progression of dementia in their loved one. Dementia Australia offers a range of services to support families through all the years that their lives are impacted by dementia.

Stages of Alzheimer's disease

Some of the features of Alzheimer's disease are commonly classified into three stages or phases. It is important to remember that not all of these features will be present in every person, and that they might occur at different stages for some people. However, it remains a useful description of the general progression of dementia caused by Alzheimer's disease.

Mild Alzheimer's disease

Sometimes this stage is only apparent in hindsight. The onset of Alzheimer's disease is usually very gradual, and it is often impossible to identify the exact time it began.

The person might:

- Appear more apathetic
- Lose interest in hobbies and activities
- Be less willing to try new things
- Be less able to adapt to change
- Be slower to grasp complex ideas and take longer with routine jobs
- Become more forgetful of recent events
- Become confused or disoriented to time and place

- Become lost if away from familiar surroundings
- Be more likely to repeat him/herself or lose the thread of their conversation
- Be more irritable or upset if a mistake is made
- Have difficulty managing finances
- Have difficulty shopping or preparing meals

Moderate Alzheimer's disease

At this stage the person's difficulties are more apparent and pervasive. A person with moderate Alzheimer's may experience significant challenges to their independence and may require significant day-to-day support.

The person might:

- Be very forgetful of current and recent events. Memory for the distant past is generally OK, but some details may be forgotten or confused.
- Be often confused regarding time and place
- Become lost more easily
- Forget names of family or friends, or confuse one family member with another
- Forget saucepans and kettles on the stove or leave gas lit
- Be less able to perform simple calculations
- Show poor judgement and make poor decisions
- See or hear things that are not there or become suspicious of others
- Become very repetitive
- Be neglectful of hygiene or eating
- Be unable to choose appropriate clothing for the weather, occasion or time of day
- Become angry, upset or distressed through frustration

National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500

dementia.org.au

Advanced Alzheimer's disease

At this stage, the person is severely impacted by dementia and needs continuous care for all daily activities.

The person might:

- Be unable to remember current or recent events, for instance forgetting that they have just had a meal or being unable to recall where they live
- Be unable to recall important events or facts from their early life
- Show confused recognition of friends and family
- Fail to recognise everyday objects or understand their purpose
- Lose their ability to understand or use speech
- Need help with eating, washing, bathing, brushing teeth, toileting and dressing
- Become incontinent
- Experience disturbed sleep
- Be restless or fidgety
- Call out frequently or have aggressive outbursts
- Have difficulty walking and other movement problems including rigidity

It is not uncommon for people with dementia to become completely immobile and dependent at the end stages of the disease. As a terminal illness, Alzheimer's disease progresses until the end of life, when extensive care is required.

Remember

Some abilities remain, although these lessen as the disease progresses. People with advancing dementia may still keep their sense of touch and hearing, and their ability to respond to emotion, even in the final stages. There are a range of approaches and activities that can be employed to take advantage of the intact abilities and interests of the person and to continue to connect with him/her. More information can be found at helpwithdementia.org.au/learn-about-dementia/spending-time-together

At all stages of Alzheimer's disease, treatments and support services are available to reduce the impact of the problems experienced. These should be utilised to ensure the best possible quality of life for every person affected by Alzheimer's disease.

The progressive nature of dementia can be very challenging for family members – both emotionally and practically. Dementia Australia offers a broad range of information, education, counselling and support services to meet these needs. Call the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500** for further information.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at dementia.org.au



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**