



P. O. Box 2842, Albertville, AL 35950

Stages of Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease gets worse over time. Experts have developed "stages" to describe how a person's abilities change from normal function through advanced Alzheimer's.

It is important to keep in mind that stages are general guides and symptoms vary greatly. Every person is unique, but we can speak about some common patterns of the illness. Those with Alzheimer's live an average of eight years after their symptoms become noticeable to other people, but survival can range from 3 to 20 years, depending on age and health conditions.

This seven-stage framework is based on a system developed by Barry Reisberg, M.D., clinical director of the New York University School of Medicine's Silberstein Aging and Dementia Research Center.

Stage 1 No Impairment – Normal function

The person does not experience any memory problems. An interview with a medical professional does not show any evidence of symptoms.

Stage 2 Very Mild Decline - May be normal age-related changes or earliest signs of Alzheimer's

The individual may feel that he or she is having memory lapses – forgetting familiar words or the location of everyday objects, but no symptoms can be detected during a medical exam or by friends, family or co-workers.

Stage 3 Mild Cognitive Decline

Early-stage Alzheimer's may be diagnosed in some, but not all, Alzheimer's patients at this point. However, friends, family or co-workers begin to take notice of difficulties. During a detailed medical interview, doctors may be able to detect problems in memory or concentration.

Common Stage 3 difficulties include:

- Noticeable problems coming up with the right word or name
- Trouble remembering names when introduced to new people
- Having noticeably greater difficulty performing tasks in social or work settings
- Forgetting material that one has just read
- Losing or misplacing a valuable object
- Increasing trouble with planning or organizing

Stage 4 Moderate Cognitive Decline – Mild or Early-stage Alzheimer's

At this point, a careful medical interview should be able to detect clear-cut problems in several areas:

- Forgetfulness of recent events
- Impaired ability to perform challenging mental arithmetic
- Greater difficulty performing complex tasks, such as planning dinner for guests, paying bills or managing finances
- Forgetfulness about one's own personal history
- Becoming moody or withdrawn, especially in socially or mentally challenging situations

Stage 5 Moderately Severe Cognitive Decline – Moderate or Mid-stage Alzheimer's

Gaps in memory and thinking are noticeable and individuals begin to need help with day-to-day activities. At this stage, those with Alzheimer's may:

- Be unable to recall their own address or phone number or the high school or college from which they graduated
- Become confused about where they are or what day it is
- Have trouble with less challenging mental arithmetic
- Need help choosing proper clothing for the season or occasion

Stage 6 Severe Cognitive Decline – Moderately Severe or Mid-stage Alzheimer's

Memory continues to worsen, personality changes may take place and individuals need significant help with daily activities. The person may:

- Lose awareness of recent experiences as well as their surroundings
- Remember their own name but have difficulty with their personal history
- Distinguish faces but have trouble remembering the name of a spouse or caregiver
- Need help dressing properly and may make mistakes such as putting pajamas over daytime clothes or shoes on the wrong feet
- Experience major changes in sleep patterns – sleeping during the day and becoming restless at night
- Need help handling details of the toilet
- Have increasingly frequent trouble controlling their bladder or bowels
- Experience major personality and behavioral changes, including suspiciousness and delusions or compulsive, repetitive behavior like hand-wringing or tissue shredding
- Tend to wander or become lost Note: 6 out of 10 Alzheimer's patients will wander and become lost

Stage 7 Very Severe Cognitive Decline – Severe or Late-stage Alzheimer's

In the final stage of this disease, individuals lose the ability to respond to the environment, to carry on a conversation and eventually, to control movement. They may still say words or phrases. At this stage, individuals will be dependant on others for their daily personal care, including eating and using the toilet. They may also lose the ability to smile, to sit without support and to hold their heads up. Reflexes become abnormal. Muscles grow rigid. Swallowing is impaired.



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