

The Seven Stages of Alzheimer's

Although everyone experiences Alzheimer's differently, the seven stages described below provide a basis for understanding how abilities change during the course of the disease.

Stage 1: No impairment

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

Stage 2: Very mild cognitive decline

The person may feel as if he or she is having memory lapses, but no symptoms of dementia can be detected during a medical examination or by friends, family or co-workers.

Stage 3: Mild cognitive decline

Friends, family or co-workers begin to notice difficulties. During a detailed medical interview, doctors may be able to detect problems in memory or concentration, such as:

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

Stage 4: Moderate cognitive decline

A careful medical interview should be able to detect symptoms in several areas:

- Forgetfulness of recent events.
- 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- Becoming moody or withdrawn.

Stage 5: Moderately severe cognitive decline

Gaps in memory and thinking are noticeable, and individuals begin to need help with day-to-day activities. Individuals may:

- Be unable to recall their address or telephone number or the high school or college from which they graduated.
- Become confused about where they are or what day it is but still remember significant details about themselves and their family.

Stage 6: Severe cognitive decline

Memory continues to worsen, personality changes may take place, and individuals need extensive help with daily activities. At this stage, individuals may:

- Lose awareness of recent experiences as well as of their surroundings.
- Remember their own name but have difficulty with their personal history.
- Distinguish familiar and unfamiliar faces but have trouble remembering the name of a spouse or caregiver.
- Need help dressing properly.
- Experience major changes in sleep patterns and have trouble controlling their bladder or bowels.
- Experience major personality and behavioral changes and may wander or become lost.

Stage 7: Very severe cognitive decline

In the final stage of the disease, individuals lose the ability to respond to their environment, to carry on a conversation and, eventually, to control movement. They may still say words or phrases.

They need help with their daily personal care, including eating or 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, and swallowing is impaired.

What to Do Next

If you suspect that you or a loved one may be experiencing symptoms of Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia, please consult your doctor.

Also contact the Alzheimer's Association. They are a valuable resource for people with Alzheimer's and their families, providing information about treatment options and support services in your local community.

Help Fight Alzheimer's

Want to help fight this dreaded disease? Consider making a donation to the Alzheimer's Association right now. Your donation will aid vital research and support essential programs for people living with Alzheimer's disease or dementia and their families in communities across the country. All donations are tax deductible.