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Stages of Alzheimer's

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Alzheimer's disease typically progresses slowly in three general stages — mild (early-stage), moderate (middle-stage), and severe (late-stage). Since Alzheimer's affects people in different ways, each person will experience symptoms - or progress through Alzheimer's stages - differently.

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Overview of disease progression

The symptoms of Alzheimer's disease worsen over time, although the rate at which the disease progresses varies. On average, a person with Alzheimer's lives four to eight years after diagnosis, but can live as long as 20 years, depending on other factors.

Changes in the brain related to Alzheimer's begin years before any signs of the disease. This time period, which can last for years, is referred to as preclinical Alzheimer's disease.

The stages below provide an overall idea of how abilities change once symptoms appear and should only be used as a general guide. They are separated into three different categories: mild Alzheimer's disease, moderate Alzheimer's disease and severe Alzheimer's disease. Be aware that it may be difficult to place a person with Alzheimer's in a specific stage as stages may overlap

Mild Alzheimer's disease (early-stage)

In the early stages of Alzheimer's, a person may function independently. He or she may still drive, work and be part of social activities. Despite this, the person may feel as if he or she is having memory lapses, such as forgetting familiar words or the location of everyday objects.

Friends, family or neighbors begin to notice difficulties. During a detailed medical interview, doctors may be able to detect problems in

Did you know?

People with cognitive changes caused by Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) have an increased risk of developing Alzheimer's or another dementia. However, not all people with MCI develop Alzheimer's.

[LEARN MORE >](#)

Although the onset of Alzheimer's disease cannot yet be stopped or reversed, an early diagnosis can allow a person the opportunity to live well with the disease for as long as possible and plan for the future.

memory or concentration. Common difficulties include:

- 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 with planning or organizing



Moderate Alzheimer's disease (middle-stage)

Moderate Alzheimer's is typically the longest stage and can last for many years. As the disease progresses, the person with Alzheimer's will require a greater level of care.

You may notice the person with Alzheimer's confusing words, getting frustrated or angry, or acting in unexpected ways, such as refusing to bathe. Damage to nerve cells in the brain can make it difficult to express thoughts and perform routine tasks.

At this point, symptoms will be noticeable to others and may include:

- Forgetfulness of events or about one's own personal history
- Feeling moody or withdrawn, especially in socially or mentally challenging situations
- Being unable to recall their own address or telephone number or the high school or college from which they graduated
- Confusion about where they are or what day it is
- The need for help choosing proper clothing for the season or the occasion
- Trouble controlling bladder and bowels in some individuals
- Changes in sleep patterns, such as sleeping during the day and becoming restless at night
- An increased risk of wandering and becoming lost
- Personality and behavioral changes, including suspiciousness and delusions or compulsive, repetitive behavior like hand-wringing or tissue shredding

During the moderate stage of Alzheimer's, individuals may have greater difficulty performing tasks such as paying bills, but they may still remember significant details about their life.

Learn more: [Know the 10 Signs](#), [Steps to Diagnosis](#), [Diagnosed with Alzheimer's](#) and [Related Dementias](#).

Learn more: [Daily Care](#) and [Behaviors](#)

Severe Alzheimer's disease (late-stage)

In the final stage of this 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, but communicating pain becomes difficult. As memory and cognitive skills continue to worsen, personality changes may take place and individuals need extensive help with daily activities.

At this stage, individuals may:

- Require full-time, around-the-clock assistance with daily personal care
- Lose awareness of recent experiences as

Get support

Late-stage care decisions can be some of the hardest families face. [Connect with other caregivers](#) who have been through the process on our online message boards and get helpful resources in our [Caregiver Center](#).

- well as of their surroundings
- Require high levels of assistance with daily activities and personal care
 - Experience changes in physical abilities, including the ability to walk, sit and, eventually, swallow
 - Have increasing difficulty communicating
 - Become vulnerable to infections, especially pneumonia

Learn more: [Late-stage Care](#)

Help is available

Your local Alzheimer's Association chapter can connect you with the resources you need to cope with the symptoms and challenges of Alzheimer's. [Find a chapter in your community](#)

Our free [24/7 Helpline](#) provides information, referral and care consultation by professionals in more than 200 languages.

Our Greenfield Library houses more than 5,000 books, journals and resources. [Access it online.](#)