

Stages & Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease

I. EARLY STAGE---FORGETFULNESS

Memory Loss Causes Small Problems

- Memory problems affect job performance
- Word loss becomes noticeable
- Problems telling time, relaying messages
- Items are misplaced and blame placed on others

Cognitive Loss Impairs Thinking

- Abstract thought and math skills are impaired
- Money management and paying bills is difficult
- Difficulty in learning new things
- Tasks are left unfinished and hobbies drop away
- Decisions become erratic and unreliable
- Judgment becomes noticeably impaired

Personality Changes

- Person loses sparkle, spontaneity, ambition
- Mild depression becomes noticeable
- Withdrawal from social activities
- Mood swings become alarming
- Angers easily and may lose impulse control
- Plays "games" to conceal losses

II. MIDDLE STAGE---CONFUSION

Memory Loss Increases--Both Short Term and Long Term

- Forgets to take medications or turn off appliances
- Repeats the same question many times within a short period
- Gets lost in familiar surroundings
- Recognizes close family members but has trouble recognizing friends & acquaintances

Cognitive Loss Increases

- Attention span decreases
- Calculation skills are lost
- Speech and understanding are slow—difficulty following the story line
- Reading and comprehension become difficult

Personality Changes Become a Problem

- Frustration increases easily to aggression
- Sleep disturbances lower the agitation flash point
- Seems self-centered, insensitive, jealous
- As depression increases, self-esteem decreases
- May refuse to wash or bathe, does not change clothes
- Social skills are strained

III. ADVANCED STAGE---DISORIENTATION

Memory Loss Becomes Severe

- Person becomes disoriented to time and place, address and phone number
- Person does not recognize family members and daily caregivers
- Unaware of recent events, sketchy recall of own life
- Repetition becomes an annoyance to caregivers

Cognitive Losses

- Can no longer manage most simple task without assistance
- Invents and uses inappropriate words; uses gibberish
- Needs assistance with dressing and bathing

Personality Changes

- Person may not respond to affection
- Person is emotional—cries easily or may become aggressive
- Person becomes suspicious and fearful
- Delusions and hallucinations common
- May engage in sexually inappropriate behavior
- Loss of most social skills

Physical Changes

- Stooped appearance and shuffling gait
- Walks with hands slightly extended, palms down
- Incontinence of bladder and sometimes bowel
- Hyper-motor phase; incessant walking
- Sleep disturbances

IV. FINAL STAGE---ABSENCE

Memory Loss Complete

- Complete disorientation
- Recognition of family is gone

Cognition Absent

- Complete disorientation
- Compulsively puts things in mouth and touches things
- Requires total care

Personality Absent

- Affect and expression are flat
- Total deterioration

Physical Changes

- Unable to speak and walk
- Chewing and swallowing difficult
- May develop seizures
- Constant chewing and smacking lips
- Becomes bedridden and lapses into a coma

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