

Stages and Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias

Please note that not everyone experiencing dementia will have all of these symptoms.

I. EARLY STAGE---FORGETFULNESS

Memory Loss Causes Small Problems

- Memory problems affect job performance
- Word loss can become noticeable
- Problems telling time, relaying messages
- Items are misplaced and others are blamed

Cognitive Loss Impairs Thinking

- Abstract thought and math skills may be impaired
- Money management and paying bills can be difficult
- There may be challenges in learning new things
- Tasks are left unfinished and hobbies drop away
- Decisions may become erratic and unreliable
- Judgment may become noticeably impaired

Personality Changes

- Person can lose his/her sparkle, spontaneity, ambition
- Mild depression may become noticeable
- May withdraw from social activities
- Mood swings may become alarming
- Person may anger easily and may lose impulse control
- May try to conceal changes in his/her abilities

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II. MIDDLE STAGE---CONFUSION

Memory Loss Increases—Both Short Term and Long Term

- May forget to take medications or turn off appliances
- Often repeats the same question many times within a short period
- May get lost in familiar surroundings
- Person may recognize close family members but may have more difficulty recognizing friends & acquaintances

Cognitive Loss Increases

- Attention span may decrease
- Calculation skills can be lost
- Speech and understanding become slower—difficulty following conversations
- Reading and comprehension may become difficult

Personality Changes Become a Problem

- Frustration may lead to increased agitation
- Sleep disturbances may lower the agitation threshold
- The person can seem self-centered, insensitive, jealous
- As depression increases, self-esteem may decrease
- May refuse to wash or bathe, may not change clothes
- Social skills may become strained
- Repetition may become an annoyance to caregivers

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III. ADVANCED STAGE---DISORIENTATION

Memory Loss Becomes Severe

- Person may become disoriented to time and place
- May not remember personal information such as address and phone number
- Person may not recognize family members and daily caregivers
- May become unaware of recent events with a sketchy recall of his/her own life

Cognitive Losses

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

Personality Changes

- Person may not respond to affection
- Person may be emotional—cries easily or may become aggressive
- Person may become suspicious and fearful
- Delusions and hallucinations can be common
- May engage in different sexual behavior
- There is a 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

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IV. FINAL STAGE---ABSENCE

Memory Loss Complete

- Complete disorientation
- Recognition of family can be lost

Cognition Absent

- Complete disorientation
- May compulsively touch things and/or put things in his/her mouth and
- Requires total care

Personality and Physical Changes

- Facial expressions are often absent
- May be unable to speak and/or walk
- Chewing and swallowing can become difficult
- The person may develop seizures
- Constant chewing and smacking lips may occur
- May become bedridden and/or lapse into a coma