

# Stages of Alzheimer's Disease

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## FACT SHEET

While the first symptoms of Alzheimer's disease vary from person to person, and the disease advances at different rates, experts have developed staging systems based on documented common patterns of symptom progression. These stages can provide general guidelines for understanding the progression of Alzheimer's symptoms and planning appropriate care.

The two most common staging systems are the 3-Stage Model and the 7-Stage Model. When reviewing staging systems, it is important to remember that each individual with Alzheimer's disease progresses differently, the time spent in each stage varies widely, and not everyone experiences all Alzheimer's disease symptoms.

### 3-Stage Alzheimer's Disease Model \*

#### Stage 1 – Mild/Early Stage

As Alzheimer's disease progresses, people experience greater memory loss and other cognitive difficulties. Problems can include wandering and getting lost, trouble handling money and paying bills, repeating questions, taking longer to complete normal daily tasks, and personality and behavior changes. People are often diagnosed in this stage.

#### Stage 2 – Moderate/Middle Stage

In this stage, damage occurs in areas of the brain that control language, reasoning, sensory processing, and conscious thought. Memory loss and confusion grow worse, and people begin to have problems recognizing family and friends. They may be unable to learn new things, carry out multistep tasks such as getting dressed appropriately, or cope with new situations. In addition, people at this stage may have hallucinations, delusions, and paranoia and may behave impulsively.

#### Stage 3 – Severe/Late Stage

Ultimately, plaques and tangles spread throughout the brain, and brain tissue shrinks significantly. People with severe Alzheimer's cannot communicate and are completely dependent on others for their care. Near the end, the person may be in bed most or all of the time as the body shuts down.

### 7-Stage Alzheimer's Disease Model \*\*

#### Stage 1 – No Impairment Evident

Memory and cognitive abilities appear normal

#### Stage 2 – Very Mild Cognitive Decline

Memory lapses and mild cognitive decline may be experienced, but are often not detected by family or friends. Changes may appear to be normal age-related changes.

### **Stage 3 – Mild Cognitive Decline**

Mild cognitive impairments begin to be more noticeable to family and friends, but may not affect daily functioning at home or work. Changes may include:

- Problems remembering names of people or coming up with the correct word
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks
- Difficulty remembering information that was recently read or heard
- Losing or misplacing items more frequently
- Problems with concentration
- Problems with planning and organizing

### **Stage 4 – Moderate Cognitive Decline**

Cognitive impairments are noticeable to family and friends, and the impairments are now affecting daily functioning at home or work. Changes may include:

- Difficulty or inability to remember current and recent events
- Forgetting parts of their personal history
- Problems with complex tasks such as managing finances, driving, or planning for a trip
- Experiencing mild to moderate anxiety, may deny symptoms or become withdrawn

### **Stage 5 – Moderately Severe Cognitive Decline**

Cognitive impairments increase, and assistance with some daily activities is now needed e.g. eating and toileting. Changes may include:

- Unable to recall contact information (i.e. phone number, complete address), parts of personal history, or names of some family members
- Disorientation to time (day/month/season) or place
- Problems with basic math skills
- Difficulty choosing appropriate clothing to wear

### **Stage 6 – Severe Cognitive Decline**

The continued increase in cognitive impairments at this stage requires assistance from others for activities of daily living to be completed. Changes may include:

- Lack of awareness of recent events and surroundings
- Inability to accurately remember the past
- Difficulty remembering names of close family and friends
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in personality and expression of emotion (delusional behavior, suspiciousness, repetitiveness, impulsivity, compulsive behaviors)
- Needing assistance with bathing, dressing, grooming, toileting, eating
- Wandering and getting lost

### **Stage 7 – Very Severe Cognitive Decline**

In this final stage of the disease, the increased cognitive impairments require assistance and supervision from others at all times. Changes may include:

- Unable to perform activities of daily living without substantial assistance (bathing, dressing, grooming, eating, toileting) and may be incontinent
- Very limited communication abilities
- Deterioration of physical systems (difficulty swallowing, rigid muscles, unable to walk independently)

\* ([www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov))

\*\* (Global Deterioration Scale or Reisberg Scale, developed by Barry Reiser, M.D.)

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