



The Stages of Alzheimer's Disease

While it is recognized that the staging of people with Alzheimer's disease is imprecise, it can be useful to have broad, general levels of disease severity. No two journeys are the same and no two individuals respond quite the same way, thus it is extremely difficult to predict exactly how the disease will progress in any individual. The stages can be characterized as mild, moderate and severe, and many symptoms can occur chronologically or simultaneously. However, not every person will experience every one of these symptoms.

EARLY STAGE (Mild) 2-4 years leading up to and including diagnosis:

- Recent memory loss begins to affect job performance or daily activities.
- Confusion about place--gets lost on way to work or to other familiar locations.
- Loss of spontaneity--spark or zest for life.
- Loss of initiative--can't start anything.
- Mood/personality changes--anxiety about symptoms; isolates self.
- Easily upset--hostile, angry, withdrawn, less outgoing.
- Unable to complete familiar tasks.
- Indecisive.
- Poor judgment--makes bad decisions.
- Takes longer with routine chores.
- Word, name-finding difficulties apparent.

MID STAGE (Moderate) 2-10 years after diagnosis – longest stage:

- Increasing memory loss and confusion.
- Shorter attention span.
- Problems recognizing close friends and/or family.
- Repetitive statements and/or movements.
- Restless, especially in late afternoon and at night.
- Occasional muscle twitches or jerks.
- Perceptual-motor problems.

- Problems organizing thoughts, thinking logically.
- Can't find right words--makes up stories to fill in blanks.
- Problems with reading, writing and numbers.
- May be suspicious, paranoid, irritable, fidgety, and teary.
- Gains and then loses weight; gradual loss of interest in food
- May see or hear things that are not there--hallucinations.
- Disorientation to time; gets days and nights confused.
- Poor grooming, refuses to bathe.
- Loss of impulse control; socially inappropriate comments.
- Denial is quite prevalent.
- Needs full-time supervision.

LATE STAGE (Severe) 1-3 years:

- Unable to recognize family members.
- Unable to recognize self in mirror.
- Loss of weight even with good diet.
- Little capacity for self care.
- Unable to communicate with words.
- May put everything in mouth or touch everything.
- Unable to control bowel or bladder.
- May have difficulty with infections, seizures, swallowing, and skin breakdown.
- Sleeps more.
- Immune system so weakened that another illness will usually be the cause of death (i.e. dehydration, pneumonia, urinary tract infection.)

This material is intended as general information. Each person with Alzheimer's disease is different and each caregiving situation is unique. Please call the Alzheimer's Alliance of Northeast Texas, Inc. at (903)509-8323 or 1-800-789-0508 (toll free) to discuss your particular situation. www.alzalliance.org