



SENIOR SERVICES
Helping Our Elderly Live With Dignity

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ELDER CARE CHOICES

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SYMPTOMS OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia. Dementia is an umbrella term for the loss of intellectual functioning and describes the state in which impairments in thinking, remembering and reasoning interfere with daily functioning. Keep in mind that just because an older person has memory loss and confusion, it may not be Alzheimer's disease. Dementia can result from a number of health conditions or diseases such as stroke, diabetes, nutritional deficiencies, alcoholism, Parkinson's disease, Lewy Body, Alzheimer's disease and other medical conditions.

Symptoms That May Suggest Alzheimer's Disease:

The early stages of Alzheimer's disease produce very subtle symptoms. Only when they begin to cause problems routinely do families begin to suspect that something is seriously wrong. Other causes of dementia will also show the same symptoms. Symptoms may include:

- Repeating the same question over and over
- Losing one's way to a familiar destination
- Getting lost in familiar surroundings
- Forgetting names of familiar people
- Taking longer than normal to complete an ordinary task
- Forgetting how to perform routine tasks
- Becoming agitated and confused by new things or changes in routine
- Having difficulty paying attention and concentrating
- Noticing a change in personal appearance and grooming habits
- Having diminished consideration for other people's feelings and established rules of social etiquette and behavior.

Many people who develop Alzheimer's disease refuse to admit they have problems with their memory. Often, they will cover up their problems so effectively that no one (except close family members) knows that there is anything wrong. In the early stages of the disease, patients look perfectly normal, but in later stages of the disease there is a decline in hygiene and appearance.

Each individual who is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease will progress at his/her own rate. No two cases are the same, and no two individuals display the same symptoms. There are no known indicators as to how long the disease will last or which symptoms a person will develop. If you suspect Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia, consult with a neurologist or a specialist in the field of geriatrics who will perform thorough medical and psychological evaluations of your loved one. There is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, but there may be medicine or treatment that can help.

Stages of Alzheimer's Disease

First Stage: (2-5 years, leading up to and including diagnosis). Symptoms include:

- Has loss of memory for recent events
- Takes longer with routine chores
- Loses things
- Arrives for appointments at the wrong time or place
- Loses spontaneity, spark or zest for life
- Loses initiative, can't start new projects
- Has trouble at work, job performance is affected
- Makes bad decisions or uses poor judgment
- Has trouble handling money, paying bills, making change, or balancing a checkbook

Second Stage: (2-10 years after diagnosis; longest stage). Symptoms include:

- Has increasing memory loss and confusion
- Has shorter attention span
- Makes repetitious statements and/or movements
- Displays occasional muscle twitches or jerking
- Has perceptual and motor problems
- Has difficulty organizing thoughts and thinking logically
- Has difficulty finding the right words; makes up stories to fill in the blanks
- Loses impulse control—less concern for manners and etiquette
- Loses concern for appearance—will not bathe, or is afraid to bathe
- Has difficulty getting dressed or wears inappropriate clothes for the season or occasion
- Is restless or agitated—particularly in the late afternoon and early evening
- Experiences substantial fluctuations in weight
- Has increasing periods of sleeplessness
- Experiences problems reading, writing, adding and subtracting numbers
- Displays suspicious, irritable, or fidgety behaviors; hallucinations; delusions or false beliefs

Third Stage: (1-3 years). Symptoms include:

- Has little or no capacity for self-care—incapable of dressing, toileting, bathing, or feeding self
- Is incapable of controlling bowel or bladder
- Loses weight even with good diet
- Loses ability to communicate with words—may use “nonsense” syllables, repeat what he has just heard, or call out the same word over and over again
- Loses motor skills—loses ability to walk upright, becomes wheelchair-bound or bed-bound
- Forgets how to eat
- May have problems with seizures, skin breakdown, swallowing
- Becomes increasing frail, increasingly susceptible to infections; increasingly lethargic
- May not recognize familiar faces