

# DEMENTIA PROGRESSION GUIDE

Dementia is a progressive condition, which means changes usually happen over time.

For many caregivers, one of the hardest parts is not knowing what is normal, what may be changing, and what might be coming next.

This guide is here to help you better understand how dementia often progresses and what kinds of changes you may begin to notice along the way.

## Important Reminder:

Every person with dementia is different. Not everyone will experience the same changes in the same order or at the same pace.

This guide is not meant to diagnose or replace medical advice. It is simply here to help caregivers feel more aware and more prepared.

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## Early Stage Dementia

In the early stage, a person may still do many things independently, but you may begin to notice changes that were not there before.

### Common Early Changes

- ☐ Forgetting recent conversations or appointments
- ☐ Repeating questions
- ☐ Trouble finding the right words
- ☐ Misplacing items more often
- ☐ Increased confusion with new tasks or changes in routine
- ☐ More anxiety, frustration, or withdrawal
- ☐ Trouble managing medications, bills, or schedules

### Caregiver Focus in the Early Stage

- Start noticing patterns and changes
- Begin planning ahead while your loved one can still participate
- Simplify routines and communication
- Watch for safety concerns at home
- Begin organizing important information

## Middle Stage Dementia

This is often the longest stage and the one where caregiving needs begin to increase the most.

Many families start to feel more overwhelmed during this stage because changes become harder to ignore and daily support is often needed more often.

### Common Middle Stage Changes

- ☐ More confusion about time, place, or people
- ☐ Increased need for help with bathing, dressing, or toileting
- ☐ Wandering or unsafe decisions
- ☐ More agitation, suspicion, or emotional changes
- ☐ Sleep problems or restlessness
- ☐ Repeating behaviors or questions more often
- ☐ Trouble following directions or completing familiar tasks
- ☐ Difficulty managing meals, medications, or hygiene independently

### Caregiver Focus in the Middle Stage

- Increase supervision and safety support
- Keep routines simple and predictable
- Watch for changes in mobility, eating, sleep, and behavior
- Begin planning for more hands-on help
- Learn what may trigger distress or resistance

Need more dementia caregiver help?

[AlzheimersInYourHome.com](http://AlzheimersInYourHome.com)

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## Late Stage Dementia

In the later stage, a person often becomes much more dependent on others for care and may have more difficulty with communication, mobility, and physical health.

This stage can feel especially heavy for caregivers, but understanding the changes can help you prepare.

### Common Late Stage Changes

- ☐ Limited speech or difficulty communicating needs
- ☐ Needing help with most or all daily care
- ☐ Difficulty walking, standing, or swallowing
- ☐ Increased sleeping or withdrawal
- ☐ More incontinence or bowel/bladder changes
- ☐ Weight loss or reduced appetite
- ☐ Increased risk of infections, falls, or skin breakdown
- ☐ Needing close supervision or full-time care

### Caregiver Focus in the Late Stage

- Focus on comfort, safety, and dignity
- Watch for pain, infections, swallowing changes, and skin issues
- Simplify care as much as possible
- Accept more help when needed
- Give yourself grace during this stage

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## What to Watch for Over Time

Sometimes the changes in dementia happen so slowly that it is hard to see them until you stop and look back.

Here are a few things to keep an eye on over time:

- ☐ Needing more help than before
- ☐ More confusion or less awareness
- ☐ Changes in walking or balance
- ☐ Changes in eating, drinking, or swallowing
- ☐ More agitation, fear, or distress
- ☐ Increased toileting problems
- ☐ More difficulty communicating
- ☐ More caregiver stress or burnout

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### Caregiver Tip

You do not have to predict every change ahead of time.

But understanding the general path of dementia can help you feel less blindsided and more prepared for what may come next.

Even small observations over time can make a big difference.

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## Signs It May Be Time for More Help

Sometimes the biggest sign of progression is not just what is happening to your loved one... it is also what is happening to you as the caregiver.

You may need more help if:

- ☐ You feel overwhelmed most days
- ☐ Safety is becoming harder to manage
- ☐ Your loved one cannot be left alone safely
- ☐ Daily care is becoming physically or emotionally exhausting
- ☐ You are constantly in “high alert” mode
- ☐ You are struggling to keep up with all of the changes

Getting more help does not mean you are failing.

It means the disease is progressing and the care needs are changing.

## Want More Help Understanding Dementia?

If you are feeling unsure about what these changes mean or what to expect next, my Understanding Dementia Course can help you better understand:

- what is happening in the brain
- why behaviors happen
- what changes often come next
- how to respond with more confidence

Learn more at: [Understanding Dementia](#)

## Want a Better Way to Track Changes Over Time?

The Caregiver's Notebook was created to help you organize care, notice patterns, and feel more prepared as dementia changes.

Learn more at: [Caregiver's Notebook](#)