

DETAILS ON THE STAGES OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE...

Symptoms of Alzheimer's disease usually progress in a recognizable pattern. These stages provide a framework for understanding the disease. It is important to remember that the stages often overlap and that not everyone will experience all of the symptoms shown here

First stage 2-4 years leading up to and including diagnosis.

First Stage: *Up to and including diagnosis*

Since the disease takes so long to develop and symptoms take so long to show up, a person may have had the disease for many years before anyone notices. On looking back, many families report they saw things here and there for many years but thought it was due to stress, depression, "change-of-life," retirement, or a number of other things. During this stage people are usually still able to function in personal and professional activities with only minor or no difficulties. It is during this stage however, that the individual and the people around them begin to notice things: depression, mood swings, short-term memory loss, and judgment problems. Often the person will attempt to mask any difficulties he/she may be having. It does become apparent during this time that something is wrong. Common problems that occur: difficulty balancing a check book, getting lost or disorientated in familiar places, letting bills go unpaid, ordering several magazine subscriptions. Even with these problems, the person can usually be left alone and unsupervised.

Symptoms:

- Recent memory loss
- Progressive forgetfulness; difficulty with routine chores
- Confusion about directions, decisions, and money management.
- Loss of spontaneity and initiative.
- Repetitive actions and statements
- Mood/personality and judgment changes
- Disorientation of time and place.

Examples:

- Forgets if the bills are paid
- Loses things and/or forgets they are lost
- Arrives at the wrong time or place
- Constantly checks the calendar
- Forgets frequently called phone numbers.

Second stage 2-10 years after diagnosis (longest stage)

Middle Stage: *The most difficult for many*

During this stage, there is an increase in memory loss and confusion. Symptoms include a loss of attention span, difficulty communicating verbally, repeating questions, statements, or behaviors. Other symptoms that may appear are increased suspicion of those around them, wandering, and inability to recognize family and friends. It is during this stage that some people become aggressive or uncooperative when performing personal care. Not everyone exhibits all of these symptoms. There is no predictor for who will have certain symptoms or how long they may last. The person with AD now requires constant supervision.

Symptoms:

- Increasing memory loss, confusion, and shorter attention span
- Difficulty recognizing close friends and/ or family
- Wandering
- Restlessness, especially in late afternoon and evening
- Occasional muscle twitching or jerking
- Difficulty organizing the thoughts or logical thinking
- May see or hear things that are not there (Hallucinations)
- Needs full-time supervision

Examples:

- Sleeps often – awakens frequently at night and may get up and wander
- Perceptual/motor problems, difficulty getting into a chair, setting the table
- Can't read signs, can't understand reading, write name, add or subtract
- Suspicious – may accuse spouse of hiding things or infidelity
- Loss of impulsive control – may undress at inappropriate time or places
- Huge appetite for junk food – forgets when last meal was eaten, may lose interest in eating.

Third Stage 1-3 years

Last or terminal Stage:

Often the easiest stage to cope with

At this point, the person requires total care and supervision. There is usually a significant weight loss. The individual can no longer control bodily functions and many experience seizure activity. He or she will lose a sense of others and may lose a sense of self as well. Often the person becomes bed bound. Most of the time a person does not die of Alzheimer's disease. During this last stage, the person becomes more susceptible to a number of virus's and infections. The physical health has deteriorated and the immune system has been compromised. An individual with AD will usually die from a pneumonia or systemic infection of some kind.

Symptoms

- Unable to recognize family members or self in mirror
- Loss of weight even with proper diet; eventually becomes emaciated
- Capacity for self-care diminished
- Oral communication disappears, eventually becomes mute
- Tries to put everything in mouth; compulsion for touching
- Bowel and bladder incontinence
- May experience difficulty with swallowing, skin infections, or seizures

Example:

- Looks in mirror and talks to own image
- Needs total care with bathing, dressing, eating, and toileting
- May groan, scream, or make grunting noises
- Sleeps more, becomes more comatose; eventually dies.