

Supporting Loved Ones as Alzheimer's Disease Progresses

Your loved one still needs your care, comfort and support through all the phases of Alzheimer's. There can be more beautiful memories made while they take this journey, and some of the most powerful memories will be yours.

While there are seven recognized stages of Alzheimer's Disease, the first three display symptoms that may be so mild, they aren't pronounced enough to be detected by family or even a physician. These early, more undetectable stages, can last two to four years and may not impact work or social lives at all. Alzheimer's Disease mainly impacts older adults over the age of 65, and once a person enters the third stage of Alzheimer's, symptoms present in ways that are more detectable to family and the physician.

Once the diagnosis has been made, however, the disease progresses in a predictable pattern. As part of a loved one's support group who battles Alzheimer's, it is helpful know what to expect in the next four phases—not only the symptoms our loved one will start to display, but also how best we still can connect with them and support them.

Stage	Symptoms	How you can support me
Early Stage (IV) (~2-4 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty concentrating • Challenges managing finances or traveling to new places • May be in denial about their symptoms • Withdrawal from family and friends • Hard to remember recent events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go with the flow of the conversation with me. I may not get the details correct but arguing with me will make me suspicious of you. • Provide guidance and routine to my days. I need to know what comes next in my day. • Body language and your vocal tone will comfort or threaten me more than the actual words you use.
Mid Stage (V) (~1 ½ years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major memory difficulties • May need assistance with daily activities • Could forget their address, phone number or the time of day • Fine motor skills may start to deteriorate • May cross others' boundaries and personal space looking to meet own needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing tasks repetitively soothes me (although it may frustrate you) • I may resist suggested activities, so connect with ME then try a different approach. • Safeguard surrounding environments from my natural curiosity, so I do not harm myself or others.
Mid Stage (VI) (~2 ½ years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could start having delusions or personality changes • Ability to speak begins to decline • Incontinence could be a challenge • Begin to forget names of close family members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music may be the best gateway to reach me • Guide my movements through demonstration not words • Switching gears can be a challenge, so go slow and steady • Watch my expressions closely to see what brings me pain or gives me joy.
Late Stage (VII) (~1 ½ years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lost the ability to speak or communicate • May require assistance with most activities • Begin to lose psychomotor skills • Difficulty breathing, swallowing and moving • Weight loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use familiar touches, textures, aromas, tastes and voices to connect with me. • Help me leave this life with grace and dignity and prepare yourself and my loved ones to let me go. I may be waiting on your permission.