

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU... CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Alzheimer's Disease Stages

Alzheimer's disease (AD) symptoms don't occur in the same order in all people and everyone with AD does not get *all* of the symptoms. It is important to understand that the effects of Alzheimer's change over time. Caregiving responsibilities will change as well. The following list of *some* of the changes that usually occur at each stage is meant to give you a *general* idea of what to expect and better care for the person with AD.



### Early Stage—Mild AD

The person appears physically the same and may handle casual conversations *almost* normally, but forgets names and events shortly after they happen and may lose zest for life and feel depressed.

- ✓ **Difficulty starting activities**
- ✓ **Difficulty learning** new things and making new memories
- ✓ **Trouble finding words**—may substitute or make up words that sound like or mean something like the forgotten word. May talk less to avoid making mistakes
- ✓ **Shorter attention span** and less ability to stay with an activity
- ✓ May **lose her way** going to familiar places
- ✓ May **resist change**
- ✓ Has **trouble organizing** and thinking logically
- ✓ Asks **repetitive questions**
- ✓ **Withdraws**, is irritable, is less sensitive to others' feelings
- ✓ **Difficulty making decisions**; for example, when asked what she wants to eat, says “I'll have what she is having”
- ✓ Takes longer to do routine chores and becomes **upset if rushed**
- ✓ May forget to pay, pays too much, or **forgets how to pay**
- ✓ **Forgets to eat**, eats only one kind of food, or eats constantly
- ✓ Loses or **misplaces things** by hiding them in odd places or forgets where things go, such as putting clothes in the dishwasher; constantly checks, searches, or **hoards** things of no value

### **Middle Stage—Moderate AD**

Behavioral and psychological symptoms occur and **poor judgment** creates safety issues when left alone—**may wander** and be at risk of exposure, poisoning, falls, self-neglect, or exploitation. Needs help finding the toilet, using the shower, remembering to drink, and dressing for the weather or the occasion.

- ☑ Less concern for **personal hygiene**
- ☑ **Mixes up identity of people**, such as thinking a wife is a stranger
- ☑ Has **trouble recognizing familiar** people and possessions; may **take things** that belong to others
- ☑ **Repeats stories**, words, or movements—such as tearing tissues
- ☑ Has **restless, repetitive movements** in late afternoon or evening, such as pacing, trying doorknobs, fingering draperies
- ☑ **Cannot organize thoughts** or follow logical explanations
- ☑ **Makes up stories** to fill in gaps in memory. For example might say, “Mama will come for me when she gets off work.”
- ☑ May be able to read but may **not understand the content**
- ☑ May accuse, threaten, curse, fidget or **behave inappropriately**, such as kicking, hitting, biting, screaming, or grabbing
- ☑ May forget traditional **table manners**
- ☑ May see, hear, smell, or taste **things that are not there (hallucinations)**
- ☑ May **accuse** spouse of an affair or others of stealing
- ☑ **Sleep patterns change**, e.g., naps frequently or awakens at night believing it is time to go to work
- ☑ Has more **difficulty positioning the body** to use the toilet or sit in a chair
- ☑ May be **incontinent** either all or some of the time
- ☑ Exhibits **inappropriate sexual behavior**, perhaps mistaking another individual for a spouse.

### **Late Stage—Severe AD**

Needs **total assistance** for all activities of daily living; becomes **bedridden**.

- ☑ **Doesn't recognize** herself or close family
- ☑ Speaks, but it is **difficult or impossible to understand** the content or may become mute, or may repetitively cry out
- ☑ May **refuse to eat**, forgets to chew and swallow
- ☑ **Bowel and bladder** control is lost
- ☑ **Forgets how to walk** or is too unsteady or weak to stand alone
- ☑ **Loses weight** and skin becomes thin and tears easily
- ☑ May **look uncomfortable** or cry out when transferred or touched
- ☑ May develop **muscle contractures** (tightening that cause pain)
- ☑ May have **seizures, frequent infections, falls**

Source: Adapted from *The Comfort of Home® for Alzheimer's Disease*

## Taking Care of Yourself—Caring for a Difficult Alzheimer’s Patient

Even the most difficult person needs to have good access to healthcare.

But doing this challenging task may take a toll on the caregiver.

To protect oneself from negative feelings, it is important to determine the underlying reasons for the person’s unpleasant behavior. Whether

it is a due to anger, pain or helplessness, one will be able to uncover the root cause of the problem with patience and gentle questioning.

Still, a caregiver should never let himself or herself be bullied. He should

always be calm, but firm, in speaking up when disallowing unreasonable

demands, especially if the person’s health or safety is at risk. It is also important

to take time out from caregiving duties before stress becomes too much to bear.



### Length of Alzheimer’s Disease Stages

The *mild* stage of AD generally lasts about two years. The *moderate* stage can last four years. The *severe* stage can last seven or more years. The length of each stage depends on many factors, including the age—and other illnesses—of the person.

## Live Life Laughing!

My knee hurts.

Well, you are getting older.  
But my other knee is the same age!



### Inspiration

*Hate harms the hated, but  
destroys the hater.*

*Thomas Hobbes*

### Don’t Fall – Be Safe

People with AD are at greater risk of falls. With increased memory impairment and poor decision-making skills, they try to walk independently when told it is not safe to do so.

*The Comfort of Home*<sup>®</sup>

### **Our Purpose**

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

### **Ordering Info**

From the publishers of

*The Comfort of Home*<sup>®</sup>

Caregiver Series

available from...

CareTrust Publications LLC

PO Box 10283, Portland, OR 97296

800-565-1533

or [www.comfortofhome.com](http://www.comfortofhome.com)

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## **SAFETY TIPS—Wandering**

It's common for a person with Alzheimer's or a related dementia to wander and become lost. Many do so *repeatedly*.

This can be dangerous, even life threatening. The stress can weigh heavily on family and caregivers.

**MediAlert<sup>®</sup> + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return<sup>®</sup> is a 24-hour nationwide emergency response service** for individuals with Alzheimer's or a related dementia who wander or have a medical emergency. They provide 24-hour assistance, no matter when or where the person is reported missing.



A caregiver or family member can enroll a person with dementia into the Alzheimer's Association's Safe Return<sup>®</sup> program by submitting an enrollment form with a \$55 plus \$7 S&H enrollment fee for the package. For an additional \$35 optional matching caregiver jewelry is available, which will alert others to look after the person with dementia should the caregiver become disabled. After one year, there is a \$35 annual administration fee.

Call **1-888-572-8566** or visit **[medicalert.org/safereturn](http://medicalert.org/safereturn)**.

NEXT ISSUE... FAINTING, FALLS & HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

# Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

## Q U I C K Q U I Z

In the early stage of Alzheimer's, it is common for caregivers (who may not yet even call themselves caregivers), to wonder how much the person can still do on his own, and when they should step in and be protective. Read the issue and answer True or False to the questions below.

1. In the early stage, the person takes longer to do routine chores and becomes upset if rushed or if something unexpected happens.  
T F
2. People with AD are at greater risk of falls because of increased memory impairment and poor decision-making skills.  
T F
3. Everyone with Alzheimer's disease get *all* of the symptoms.  
T F
4. It is important to determine the *underlying* reasons for the Alzheimer's person's behavior.  
T F
5. The effects of Alzheimer's disease change over time.  
T F
6. In the late stage, the person needs total assistance for all activities of daily living.  
T F
7. The length of each stage depends on many factors, including the age of the person and the other illnesses the person has.  
T F
8. In the late stage, the person speaks, but it is difficult or impossible to understand the content.  
T F
9. In the late stage, the person will still remember how to chew and swallow.  
T F
10. The AD patient sometimes loses or misplaces things by hiding them in odd places or forgets where things go, such as putting clothes in the dishwasher.  
T F

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_