

What is Alzheimer's?

Alzheimer's is a disease that progresses slowly, typically in three different stages (often written as "mild", "moderate", and "severe"). It affects everyone differently, though, and so each person may experience symptoms—or progress through the stages, differently.

Symptoms of Alzheimer's disease worsen over time. On average, a person with Alzheimer's will live four to eight years after their diagnosis, but they can live up to 20 depending on certain factors. Changes in the brain can occur years prior to any signs of the disease become apparent. This period is referred to as preclinical Alzheimer's disease, and can last for years.

The stages of Alzheimer's (see table on next page) provide a general idea of how abilities can change once symptoms start to appear. They should only be used as a general guide (note: Dementia is a broader term used to describe the symptoms of mental decline that accompany Alzheimer's and other brain diseases).



All information provided from Alzheimer's association. To learn more about the three stages of Alzheimer's, or how to care people with Alzheimer's/Dementia, see the next page for tips and guidance.

Early Stage (Mild)	Middle Stage (Moderate)	Late Stage (Severe)
<p>The person may function independently. They may drive, work and participate in social activities. Despite this, the person may have memory lapses (e.g. forgetting familiar words or location of familiar objects). Symptoms may not be apparent but it's important take notice.</p>	<p>Typically, the longest stage, can last many years. As the disease progresses, the patient will require a greater level of care. Dementia symptoms are more pronounced. The person may confuse words, get frustrated, and act in unexpected ways (e.g. refusing to bathe). Damage to nerve cells in the brain can make it difficult for the person to express thoughts and perform routine tasks without assistance. During this stage, the person with Alzheimer's can still participate in daily activities with assistance. It's important to learn what the person can still do or find ways to simplify tasks. As the need for more intensive care increases, caregivers may want to consider respite care or an adult day center so they can have a temporary break from caregiving while the person living with Alzheimer's continues to receive care in a safe environment.</p>	<p>Dementia symptoms are severe. Individuals lose the ability to respond to their environment, to carry on a conversation and, eventually, to control movement. They may still say words or phrases, but communicating pain becomes difficult. As memory and cognitive skills continue to worsen, significant personality changes may take place and individuals need extensive care.</p>
<p><u>Difficulties include:</u> Coming up with the right word or name, remembering names when introduced to new people, having difficulty performing tasks in social or work settings., forgetting material that was just read, losing or misplacing a valuable object, experiencing increased trouble with planning or organizing.</p>	<p><u>Symptoms:</u> Being forgetful of events or personal history, feeling moody or withdrawn, especially in socially or mentally challenging situations, being unable to recall information about themselves like their address or telephone number, experiencing confusion about where they are or what day it is, requiring help choosing proper clothing for the season or the occasion, having trouble controlling their bladder and bowels, experiencing changes in sleep patterns, showing an increased tendency to wander and become lost, demonstrating personality and behavioral changes, including suspiciousness and delusions or compulsive, repetitive behavior</p>	<p><u>Individuals may:</u> Require around-the-clock assistance with daily personal care, lose awareness of recent experiences as well as of their surroundings, experience changes in physical abilities, including walking, sitting and, eventually, swallowing, have difficulty communicating, become vulnerable to infections, especially pneumonia</p>

Tips on Caring for Alzheimer's Patients

Establishing daily routines can be helpful for both the caregiver and the person living with Alzheimer's. This gives you more time to spend on meaningful activities that you enjoy. Making time for yourself or the person with Alzheimer's in activities you enjoy is important, and **structured or pleasant activities can reduce agitation and improve mood**. Consider the person's interests, likes, dislikes, strengths, abilities, etc.

In the early stage, some people may still be independent and continue with certain routines. It's important as a caregiver to **provide support and companionship and help to plan for the future**. You may feel unsure or have questions about where to go for resources or concerns about your ability to care for the person. These are perfectly normal. Receiving an early diagnosis provides opportunity to make decisions about the future together. Supporting everyday tasks is important to help develop coping strategies and maximizing their independence. Finding a balance between independence and interdependence will help to develop confidence for you and the person with Alzheimer's. **Some helpful tips to consider:** *Is there an immediate danger for the person to perform a task alone? Prioritize tasks or actions that do not cause unnecessary stress for the person. Assume the person with Alzheimer's can complete the task. Talk to the person directly to help determine the best kind of support you can provide.*

Emotions such as fear and denial are common for caregivers and patients. The ability to talk through these in the beginning and process them helps work past difficult feelings and enjoy quality time together.

During the middle stage of Alzheimer's, brain damage can **make it difficult to express thoughts and perform routine tasks**. The person affected may become frustrated or act out of character. These changes may be difficult but there are resources available to help everyone involved (visit alz.org/help-support for more details). Flexibility and patience are essential during this stage. There will be greater responsibility as the person gradually loses their independence. Learn what to expect in the middle stages of the disease so you can be prepared. **Some tips from caregivers includes:** *Use a calm voice when responding to repeated questions. Respond to the emotion, instead of the specific question; the person may simply need reassurance. Use simple written reminders if the person can still read. If you notice changes, check with the doctor to rule out other physical problems or medication side effects.*

In the late stage, **the person affected will usually require around the clock care**. The role of the caregiver is to primarily preserve quality of life and dignity. Though the person may lose the ability to speak or express concern, research indicates that some of the person's core self remains. Their world will be mostly explored through the senses. **Expressing care through touch, sound, sight, taste and smell can help to deepen connections.**

It is important, above all, to take care of your health, and seek out support when you need it. For information on services or access to services, call Bay Aging at 1-800-493-0238. For more information or resources, visit <https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving>



Bay Aging is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization established in 1978.
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Alzheimer's and Young Adults

Alzheimer's is not just a disease that affects people of old age. Younger onset (or also known as "early onset") Alzheimer's can affect people younger than 65. Up to 5% of more than 5 million Americans with Alzheimer's have younger onset.



Many people with early onset are in their 40s and 50s. In the U.S., it is estimated that around 200,000 people have early onset.

Oftentimes, healthcare providers do not generally look for Alzheimer's in younger people. This makes trying to receive a proper diagnosis of early onset Alzheimer's a **long and frustrating process**. Symptoms may be incorrectly attributed to stress or there may be conflicting diagnosis from different healthcare professionals. People who have early onset Alzheimer's may be in either the early, middle, or late stage. Every person is different and will not be affected in the same way.

If you find yourself experiencing memory problems:

- Have a medical evaluation with a doctor who specializes in Alzheimer's disease. Getting a diagnosis involves a medical exam and possibly cognitive tests, a neurological exam and/or brain imaging. [Contact your local Alzheimer's Association for a referral.](#)
- Write down any symptoms of memory loss or other cognitive difficulties to share with your health care professional.
- Keep in mind that there is no one test that confirms Alzheimer's disease. A diagnosis is only made after a comprehensive medical evaluation.

Doctors do not understand why most cases of early onset Alzheimer's appear at such a young age. But in a few hundred families worldwide, scientists pinpointed several rare genes that directly cause Alzheimer's. People who inherit these rare genes tend to develop symptoms in their 30s, 40s and 50s. When Alzheimer's disease is caused by deterministic genes, it is called "familial Alzheimer's disease," and many family members in multiple generations are affected.

To benefit from respite services, call Bay Aging at 1-800-493-0238. If you have early onset, you are not alone. There are ways to get help, stay involved and active. See [Alzheimer's Association](#) for more information.



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