



# Understanding Alzheimer's

*What happens during the different stages of the disease*

Information in this brochure was adapted from:

"10 Early Signs and Symptoms of Alzheimer's," The Alzheimer's Association,  
accessed July 2013, [http://www.alz.org/alzheimers\\_disease\\_10\\_signs\\_of\\_alzheimers.asp](http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_10_signs_of_alzheimers.asp)



## Understanding Alzheimer's

*Alzheimer's is the most common type of dementia. While there is currently no cure for it, treatments are available to help ease some of its symptoms.*

*The earlier the disease is diagnosed, the more treatment options may be available, and the better the chances of enhancing quality of life during each stage of the disease.*



As we get older, many of us experience some degree of forgetfulness or “senior moments.” It’s normal to wonder if this could indicate a more serious problem. If you or a loved one are concerned about recent changes in memory or behavior, a visit to your physician is a good place to start.

“Dementia” is a general term used to describe a decline in mental ability (for example, problems with memory, thinking, and behavior). Alzheimer’s disease is the most common type of dementia. In general it affects people aged 65 and over, but early-onset Alzheimer’s occurs in a small percentage of people in their 40s and 50s.

While there is currently no cure for Alzheimer’s, there may be treatments available to help ease some of its symptoms. Today, researchers around the world continue to develop and test potential new treatments for this increasingly common disease.

There are several stages of cognitive decline associated with Alzheimer’s disease. The earlier the disease is diagnosed, the more treatment options may be available, and the better the chances of enhancing quality of life during each stage.

### Mild cognitive decline

The mildest stages of the disease range from no apparent impairment to mild cognitive decline. Some people may mistake the beginnings of Alzheimer’s for natural aging or forgetfulness, as these memory lapses are not often noticeable to family and friends.

As the disease progresses, some symptoms may become evident to affected individuals and their family members and friends. These symptoms may include:

- Problems with finding the right name or word
- A decrease in work performance
- Declining reading retention
- Misplacing valuables
- Trouble planning or organizing

## Understanding Alzheimer's

*Alzheimer's is now the sixth leading cause of death in the U.S., and the number of people age 65 and older with Alzheimer's disease may nearly triple by 2050.\* Costs of caring for people with Alzheimer's and other dementias will soar from an estimated \$203 billion this year to a projected \$1.2 trillion per year by 2050.\**



\* Alzheimer's Association, 2013 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures, Alzheimer's & Dementia, Volume 9, Issue 2.

### Moderate cognitive decline

At this stage, a thorough interview by a physician can detect deficiencies in the following areas:

- Decreased knowledge of recent occasions or current events and reduced memory of personal history
- Impaired ability to perform challenging math
- Decreased capacity to perform complex tasks, such as planning dinner for guests or managing personal finances
- Subdued or withdrawn appearance, especially in socially or mentally challenging situations

### Moderately severe cognitive decline

Larger gaps in memory and deficits in cognitive function begin to become apparent, and some assistance with day-to-day activities becomes necessary. At this stage, individuals may:

- Be unable to recall important details such as their current address or telephone number, or the name of their college or high school
- Become confused about their whereabouts and/or the time
- Have trouble with simple math
- Still retain substantial knowledge about themselves and know their own names and the names of family members



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*As the baby boomer population ages and life expectancies continue to increase, Alzheimer's has the potential to place a huge strain on the healthcare system over the next several decades.*

*By focusing on the development of new diagnostic tools and treatment options, the medical community can help to address this serious challenge.*



## Severe cognitive decline

Memory difficulties continue to worsen, significant personality changes may emerge and affected individuals need extensive help with customary daily activities. At this stage, individuals may:

- Lose most awareness of recent experiences and events as well as of their surroundings
- Have trouble remembering their personal history, although they generally recall their own names
- Need help getting dressed
- Have trouble sleeping
- Experience significant personality changes and behavioral symptoms, including suspiciousness, delusions and hallucinations; or compulsive, repetitive behaviors such as hand-wringing
- Begin to wander and become lost

## Very severe cognitive decline

This is the final stage of the disease when individuals lose the ability to respond to their environment, to carry on a conversation and, eventually, to control movement. Individuals at this stage need help with much of their daily care, including eating and using the bathroom.

At this stage, individuals may:

- Still say words or phrases
- Lose their capacity to smile
- Lose their capacity to sit without support and hold their heads up
- Have abnormal reflexes and rigid muscles
- Have impaired swallowing