

# ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a neurological condition in which the nerve cells of the brain die. The onset of AD is typically gradual, and the first signs of it may be attributed to old age or ordinary forgetfulness. Although the symptoms may vary for each individual, the disease usually begins to affect people in their mid-60s and continues to progress over time. As the disease advances, cognitive abilities, including the ability to make decisions and perform everyday tasks, are eroded, and personality changes and difficult behaviors may emerge.

People with Alzheimer's live an average of 8 years after diagnosis, although some may live for as many as 20 years. To help understand the changes occurring as the disease progresses, AD is broken into stages: early, middle and late. It is important to remember, however, that the development of symptoms will differ from person to person and that each stage will gradually progress over a period of years.

It is not unusual for people with AD to have "good days" and "bad days." For example, a person with early-stage AD may not show symptoms one day, the next he or she may have trouble remembering names or finding the milk in the refrigerator.

## Early-Stage Alzheimer's:

- » Trouble remembering recent events and conversations
- » Difficulty remembering the month or day of the week
- » Loss of ability to manage finances
- » Withdrawal from social situations and general apathy
- » Cooking and shopping become difficult
- » Poor judgment/difficulty making decisions
- » Tendency to lose things
- » May become disoriented in familiar surroundings

## Middle-Stage Alzheimer's:

- » Difficult behaviors emerge
- » Anger, suspiciousness, overreacting and paranoia
- » Wandering
- » Repeating questions or statements
- » Sundowning (i.e., restlessness or agitation in the evenings)
- » Fear of baths
- » Hallucinations
- » Eating problems
- » Incontinence
- » Hoarding behavior

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- » Inappropriate sexual behavior
- » Violent behavior

## Late-Stage Alzheimer's:

- » Inability to communicate
- » Inability to recognize people, places and objects
- » Cannot participate in any personal care activities
- » Loses ability to walk and smile
- » Muscles may become contracted
- » May lose ability to swallow
- » Seizures may occur
- » Weight loss and incontinence
- » Majority of time spent sleeping

## Treatment for Alzheimer's disease:

Presently, researchers cannot definitively say what causes Alzheimer's disease, and there is currently no cure. However, considerable progress has been made in the field of AD research in recent years, including the development of several medications for early-stage AD.

## Learn more:

Inland Northwest Alzheimer's Association  
(<https://www.alz.org/alzwa>)

Aging and Long-Term Support Administration  
(<https://my.spokanecity.org/bcc/boards/aging-and-long-term-care-of-eastern-washington/>)