

# Understanding the Stages of Dementia: a Family Guide



## About this Guide:

Caring for a loved one with dementia can be overwhelming, especially as their needs evolve over time. Understanding the stages of dementia can help families prepare for the changes ahead and provide the right support at the right time.

Dementia progresses gradually, and while every person's journey is unique, the condition typically follows a pattern of increasing cognitive and physical changes. This guide will walk you through the **four stages of dementia**, outlining what to expect and offering practical caregiving tips for each phase.



## 1. Early Stage (Mild Dementia)

In the early stage of dementia, individuals often still function independently but may start experiencing noticeable memory lapses and difficulties with daily tasks.

### What to Expect:

- Occasional forgetfulness, such as missing appointments or misplacing objects
- Difficulty finding words or following conversations
- Trouble with problem-solving or managing finances
- Increased anxiety, mood swings, or withdrawal from social activities

### How to Help:

- **Encourage Routine:** Establishing consistent daily habits and routines can help reduce confusion.
- **Provide Gentle Reminders:** Sticky notes, calendars, and automated medication dispensers can help maintain independence.
- **Support Emotional Well-Being:** Encourage socialization, hobbies, and familiar activities that bring joy.
- **Plan for the Future:** Begin discussions about care preferences, financial planning, and legal arrangements while your loved one is still able to express their wishes.

## 2. Middle Stage (Moderate Dementia)

As dementia progresses, memory loss and confusion become more pronounced, and individuals often require more assistance with daily activities.

### What to Expect:

- Forgetting personal history or familiar faces
- Increased difficulty with communication and problem-solving
- Wandering, getting lost, or increased confusion in new environments
- Changes in sleep patterns and increased restlessness
- Emotional and behavioral shifts, including aggression or depression

### How to Help:

- **Create a Safe Home Environment:** Reduce fall risks by removing tripping hazards, such as throw rugs, and securing doors and cabinets with locks.
- **Use Simple Communication:** Speak slowly, use short sentences, and use visual cues, such as objects or pictures, when possible.
- **Establish a Structured Routine:** Predictable routines can help reduce anxiety and agitation.
- **Provide Assistance with Self-Care:** Be patient and provide step-by-step verbal cues or hands-on assistance with dressing, bathing, grooming, and eating.
- **Consider Support Services:** If caregiving becomes too demanding, explore home care or start researching memory care communities for long-term support or respite care to give yourself a break.

## 3. Late Stage (Advanced Dementia)

In the late stage, dementia significantly impacts cognitive and physical abilities, often requiring full-time care.

### What to Expect:

- Severe memory loss, including inability to recognize family members
- Loss of verbal communication or reliance on nonverbal gestures
- Difficulty swallowing, increasing the risk of choking and infections
- Inability to walk or sit up without support
- Increased vulnerability to infections such as pneumonia

### How to Help:

- **Focus on Comfort and Quality of Life:** Gentle touch, soft music, and familiar scents can provide reassurance.
- **Use Adaptive Feeding Strategies:** A modified diet or assistive utensils may be needed to prevent choking.
- **Ensure Proper Mobility Support:** Specialized walkers, canes, wheelchairs, and positioning aids can enhance comfort and support.
- **Seek Professional Care:** Specialized memory care communities provide care and support, prioritizing safety and dignity in this stage.

## 4. End-of-Life Stage

At this final stage, individuals often require around-the-clock care, and the focus shifts to comfort and dignity.

### What to Expect:

- Minimal or no verbal communication
- Extreme frailty and increased time spent sleeping
- Difficulty swallowing, leading to weight loss
- Gradual shutdown of bodily functions

### How to Help:

- **Provide Comforting Sensory Experiences:** Play their favorite music, hold their hand, or softly talk to them.
- **Ensure Pain Management:** Work with a medical team to ensure pain and discomfort are minimized.
- **Seek Hospice or Palliative Care Support:** These services focus on making the individual as comfortable as possible while offering emotional support for families.

## When Caregiving Becomes Too Much

As dementia progresses, the level of care required changes. Families may find it challenging to balance their loved one's needs with their own well-being. Providing care at home can be physically and emotionally exhausting, and there may come a time when full-time professional support is the best option for both your loved one and your family.

Options like respite care can provide short-term relief for family caregivers, allowing them to rest and recharge while ensuring their loved one receives expert care in a safe, structured environment. When full-time care is needed, memory care communities offer specialized services tailored to each stage of dementia, ensuring safety, comfort, and engagement in a supportive setting.



## The Ganzhorn Suites: Personalized Memory Care for Every Stage

At The Ganzhorn Suites, we understand that dementia care is not one-size-fits-all. That's why we offer a purpose-built household model, where each small household is dedicated to a different stage of dementia.

This stage-specific approach ensures that residents always receive the appropriate care when they need it, without being overwhelmed by an environment that doesn't match their abilities.

- **Specialized**, individualized care at each stage of dementia
- **Purposefully designed** small households that minimize confusion and promote engagement
- **Certified Dementia Practitioners** trained in best practices and evidence-based dementia care
- **Personalized enrichment** programs tailored to each resident's hobbies, interests, and abilities

Whether your loved one is in the early stages or requires full-time support, **The Ganzhorn Suites** is here to help. **Contact us today at 614-356-9810 (Powell) or 440-294-1500 (Avon) to learn more or schedule a tour.**

