



STAGES OF DEMENTIA:

WHAT TO EXPECT, HOW TO CONNECT

Dementia affects each person differently, but symptoms often follow a general pattern over time.

Early Stage Dementia

Goal: To help the person stay safe, calm, engaged and independent as possible

Common Challenges

- Short-term memory loss
- Difficulty finding words or following conversations
- Trouble with planning, organizing, multi-tasking
- Increased anxiety, frustration, or social changes

Support

- Gentle reminders for hygiene and routines
- Monitor safety (falls, meds, food, water temperature)
- Encourage independence and privacy
- Prompt regular meals and hydration
- Support hobbies and meaningful activities

Middle Stage Dementia

Goal: To guide, reassure, and simplify – provide safety and structure

Common Challenges

- Increased memory loss and confusion
- Difficulty understanding instructions or processing language
- Changes in behavior (agitation, wandering, suspicion, repetition)
- Needing assistance with daily activities

Support

- Use step-by-step cues – show vs tell
- Maintain routines and offer calm, consistent reassurance
- Support eating: help start meals, model actions, reduce distractions
- Encourage hydration: regular small sips, familiar cups
- Adapt activities: shorter, simpler, sensory or repetitive tasks
- Monitor for safety and signs of pain

Late Stage Dementia

Goal: To provide comfort, safety, and connection with patience and compassion

Common Challenges

- Limited verbal communication or loss of speech
- Significant physical changes (mobility, swallowing, endurance)
- Increased vulnerability and total dependence on caregivers
- Difficulty recognizing people or surroundings

Support

- Provide hands-on assistance while maintaining dignity
- Offer simple choices and gentle cues
- Ensure meals and fluids are easy to access; offer frequent encouragement
- Focus on sensory engagement: touch, music, familiar objects
- Monitor closely for safety, pain, or distress
- Maintain a calm environment and provide reassurance.

Best Practices at Every Stage of Dementia

- **Approach in the person's visual field** and from the front; connect before touching
- **Agree rather than argue** – validate and join their reality
- **Look for the unmet need** behind behaviors (pain, fear, hunger, need for purpose)
- **Treat the person as an adult** with dignity, respect, and honor
- **Create a dementia-friendly environment** (calm, warm, familiar, uncluttered, well-lit)
- **Honor personal preferences, history, and routines**