

Alzheimer's Care with Dignity

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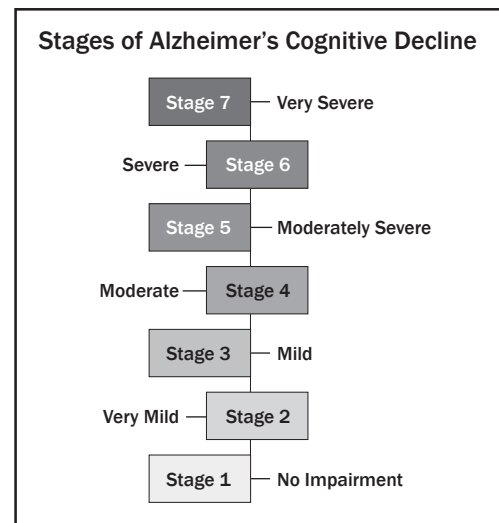
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Alzheimer's (älts-hī-merz) disease (AD) is a brain disorder named for German physician Alois Alzheimer who first described it in 1906. It is the most common form of dementia, which is a general term for the loss of memory and other intellectual abilities serious enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's destroys brain cells, causing problems with memory, thinking, and behavior. It progresses over time and is fatal.

More than 5 million Americans are living with AD, and it is the sixth-leading cause of death in the United States. However, most people who have AD die of some other cause such as pneumonia. Currently, there is no cure. Treatments for symptoms, combined with the right services and support, can improve quality of life for both the individual and family members.



10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

1. Memory loss
2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks
3. Problems with language
4. Disorientation to time and place
5. Poor or decreased judgment
6. Problems with complex mental tasks
7. Misplacing things
8. Changes in mood or behavior
9. Changes in personality
10. Loss of initiative

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Healthy Brain Checklist

Every week strive to do the following:

- Eat salmon or other fatty fish (Omega 3-rich foods) at least 2 times a week.
- Eat berries or other antioxidant-rich foods at least 3 times a week.
- Take folic acid or eat folic acid enriched food.
- Enjoy at least 30 minutes of physical activity daily.
- Use the opposite hand to brush your teeth.
- Work a crossword puzzle or brain-teaser.
- Read every section of the newspaper instead of watching television.
- Get together with family and friends.
- Enjoy cards, a board game, or a puzzle.
- Learn a new song.
- Teach someone a skill or craft.
- Try a new recipe – then share it with a friend.
- Volunteer regularly.

(Suggestions from the “Caregiver Guide: Tips for Caregivers of People with Alzheimer’s Disease,” the National Institute on Aging)

Communication

- Visit a person with Alzheimer’s at their best time of day. If he or she doesn’t recognize you or is unkind, don’t take it personally – try to respond to the feelings being communicated. Or, try to guide the person to a different topic. Remember, he or she is reacting out of confusion.
- Use simple words, short sentences, and a gentle tone of voice. Don’t argue.
- Do not talk to the person like a baby or as though he or she were not present
- Minimize distractions and noise such as the television and radio when communicating. Some may have trouble discerning the difference from the real world and a television show; if so, avoid violent and disconcerting television programming.
- Schedule doctor’s appointments during the person’s best time of day; inform the staff that the person has Alzheimer’s.

Personal Care

- If bathing is challenging or scary for the individual, plan it for the time of day when the person is the most agreeable and calm. Use sponge baths intermittently
- Try to develop a routine for everything, especially toileting, bedtime, and meals.
- Arrange clothes in the order they are to be put on to help the person move through the process; have duplicates of favorite outfits.
- View mealtimes as opportunities for much-needed social interaction – aim for a calm, reassuring atmosphere. Serve small portions or several small meals.
- If the person has trouble using utensils, use a bowl (instead of a plate), straws, cups with lids, and utensils with large handles.
- As the disease progresses, be aware of the increased risk of choking caused by chewing and swallowing problems.

Exercise

- Incorporate activities the person seems to enjoy into your daily routine – setting the table, putting away dishes, folding laundry, gardening, walking the dog, etc.
- Encourage physical activity – spend time outdoors (weather permitting).

Safety

- Secure medications, knives, lighters, and guns and be alert to kitchen safety issues.
- Keep the house free of clutter, remove throw rugs. Provide good lighting inside and out.

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