

## A Care Partner’s Guide to the Stages of Dementia

The chart below **summarizes** the characteristics of the progression of dementia. These stages only provide a **general guide** – the stages and progression vary depending on the underlying cause. Some stages may overlap, and the time spent in each stage varies greatly from individual to individual. **However, understanding the general characteristics of each stage can help the care partner(s) better anticipate and address needs throughout the course of the disease process.**

<b>Early/Mild</b> (about 2 years)	<b>Middle/Moderate</b> (8 – 20 years)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Still can function independently for activities such as dining, dressing/grooming, personal hygiene.</li> <li>• Social skills still in tact.</li> <li>• Memory lapses; decline in communication abilities.</li> <li>• May have difficulty learning new things and following conversations.</li> <li>• Minor personality changes.</li> <li>• Symptoms may not be apparent to others, but family may notice changes.</li> </ul> <p><b>CARE PARTNER ROLE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple reminders and occasional prompting.</li> <li>• Encourage independence and sense of identity.</li> <li>• Offer assistance with tasks such as financial and legal matters, medication management, shopping, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant memory deficits and confusion – may forget address or phone number, time of day, location; difficulty staying on task, sequencing (ex. clothing in correct order).</li> <li>• Easily frustrated, angry.</li> <li>• May behave in ways that are out of character; loss of social filter.</li> <li>• Begins to exhibit dementia-related behaviors such as wandering, agitation, sundowning, paranoia.</li> </ul> <p><b>CARE PARTNER ROLE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More frequent prompting and reminding.</li> <li>• Simplify meal process &amp; other self-care tasks.</li> <li>• Encourage use of remaining abilities.</li> <li>• Reassure.</li> <li>• Provide transportation (should no longer drive).</li> </ul>
<b>Late/Advanced/Moderately Severe</b> (several weeks to several years)	<b>End-Stage/Severe</b> (6-7 years)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little memory of recent events; may begin to forget names of close family members.</li> <li>• Great difficulty communicating; primarily communicates through behaviors.</li> <li>• May experience loss of bowel/bladder control.</li> <li>• Personality changes.</li> <li>• Changes in physical abilities: walking, sitting, swallowing; fall risk.</li> </ul> <p><b>CARE PARTNER ROLE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually requires 24/7 assistance to carry out ADL’s (dressing, bathing, toileting, etc.).</li> <li>• Provide physical prompts and cues.</li> <li>• Maintain safe environment.</li> <li>• Focus on sensory input: touch, taste, smell, vision, hearing (music).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wheelchair and/or bed bound.</li> <li>• Loss of ability to communicate verbally.</li> <li>• Not oriented with regard to time or place.</li> <li>• Progressive loss of abilities to walk, sit up, smile, hold up head.</li> <li>• Difficulty chewing and swallowing.</li> <li>• Vulnerable to infections like pneumonia.</li> </ul> <p><b>CARE PARTNER ROLE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires 24/7 assistance with all activities.</li> <li>• Provide comfort.</li> <li>• Help to maintain dignity.</li> <li>• Focus on sensory stimulation.</li> </ul>