

The stages of Alzheimer's disease:

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For caregivers of people with Alzheimer's disease, each day brings new challenges and problems. These can only be solved with the use of different caregiving techniques depending on the stage of the illness. Care Guide gives you an insight into the changes Alzheimer's will bring, and offers you some expert advice and practical tips on how to cope with them.

Alzheimer's is not just the anguish of watching someone dying slowly due to the devastating effects of the illness. Or the hard, and often frustrating, work you do to alleviate their sufferings.

It's also watching the person's needs change continuously.

An ongoing challenge

What works one day may not work the next, making it an ongoing challenge to solve the new problems faced nearly every day.

What's happening is that the mental and physical decline in Alzheimer's evolves through different stages, during which new problems arise, which require new caregiving strategies.

"Alzheimer's causes different problems at different times," says Dr. William Molloy, of St. Peter's Centre for Studies in Aging, Ontario, Canada. **"Therefore, staging the disease is very important, as it allows you to predict how the person's needs change with time.**

"The impact of this on the quality of life of Alzheimer's patients is huge, because defining the characteristics of the various stages of Alzheimer's allows family and professional caregivers to choose the best treatments."

Gaining knowledge

"Caregivers who have knowledge of the issues associated with each stage of the illness know what's

happening to their loved one, and have a clearer idea of what to do. In other words, they can recognize the problem and provide appropriate, effective care.

"In addition, knowing how functional abilities deteriorate throughout the course of the disease, gives caregivers the best chances to anticipate the needs of the person they care for," says Molloy.

This allows them to "make informed decisions that may allow their loved ones to enjoy their life for longer."

Alzheimer's progresses through four main stages:

- **Early**
- **Middle**
- **Late**
- **Terminal**

Early Alzheimer's

At this stage, which may last up to four years, the person has sporadic episodes of short-term memory loss, often mistakenly attributed to old age. They may forget keys, glasses, a purse or wallet. They may leave the lights on,



Normal activities such as shopping trips and other excursions can be enjoyed in the earlier stages of the disease. (Administration on Aging photo.)