

CARE Compass

Helping Navigate the Later Stages of Dementia



Brain Changes in Later Stages

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Center on Aging

This project was made possible by a generous gift.

The goal of the program is to help provide tools and information so that you can navigate the later stages of dementia. We hope that you find these videos and resources to be helpful and encouraging.

This program is designed to be a guide only for the compassionate care and support of your loved one and is not medical advice. If you have questions or concerns, always check with your doctor.

We also want to acknowledge that late-stage dementia can look very different from person to person. Sometimes the ideas we share may not work or work for a short time. That is okay. No one person is alike, and what works today may not work tomorrow. We hope to provide tools that can be options for you to try.

This guide contains links and other resources that may not be provided by the presenter but are added to the guide to provide additional information and support.

Brain Changes in the Later Stages of Dementia

As dementia progresses, changes in the brain spread to areas that control memory, thinking, movement, communication, and eventually basic body functions. Understanding these changes can help caregivers prepare for increasing care needs.

What may happen as dementia progresses?

- Different types of dementia progress differently, but eventually more areas of the brain become affected.
- As the disease advances, a person **may** experience:
 - Seizures
 - Loss of bladder and bowel control
 - Muscle stiffness, spasticity, or contractures
 - Increasing difficulty walking or eventual inability to walk
 - Difficulty communicating
 - Increasing dependence on others for daily care
 - Becoming bedridden

What This Means for Caregivers

These changes are a result of the disease and are not intentional behaviors or choices. As abilities decline, caregiving needs will increase.

In the later stages, care increasingly focuses on comfort, safety, dignity, and quality of life. Healthcare providers, dementia specialists, palliative care teams, and hospice professionals can help manage symptoms and support caregivers as needed.

Websites With More Information

End of Life with Dementia – Brigham and Women's / Harvard

<https://cbmm.bwh.harvard.edu/index.php/support-education/for-family-caregivers/end-of-life-with-dementia/>

Making decisions for someone at their end of life

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/end-life/making-decisions-someone-end-life>

Three Common Medical Issues with Advanced Dementia

<https://compassionandchoices.org/news/three-common-medical-issues-with-advanced-dementia/>