



WHAT IS ALZHEIMER'S?

Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia, accounting for between 60%-80% of cases. Like most kinds of dementia, it usually affects people over the age of 65, but those in their 40s and 50s might develop early-onset Alzheimer's. In these cases, Alzheimer's can be genetic, with family members across multiple generations developing the disease.

There are 3 main categories of Alzheimer's disease: early-, middle- and late-stage.

Early- or mild-stage Alzheimer's

People with symptoms of Early Alzheimer's are often assumed to be "getting old" as they struggle to find the right words or forget where they have put everyday objects. It's probable that the person will remain independent, not realising anything is wrong or changing.

Gradually, their memory issues will become more pronounced and they might have trouble remembering something they had just read, forgetting people's names when introduced, or even find it hard to remember plans, cope with finances and meal planning.

It's at this stage that relatives or friends need to reach out for support.

Middle- or moderate-stage Alzheimer's

The middle stage of Alzheimer's tends to be the longest-lasting and professional care is probably required as they progress through this stage.

Symptoms are likely to vary significantly from person to person. Some may remember their own personal history, while others might struggle. The person is likely to be confused more easily, have a tendency to wander and become lost, or not remember what day of the week it is. Situations that require multiple sensory inputs, such as social gatherings, are likely to become overwhelming. The distress of this experience is likely to lead your loved one to become withdrawn or frustrated.

During this stage, damage to the brain cells may now be causing personality changes. Examples can include suspicion of people, the exhibition of repetitive behaviours and experiencing hallucinations or delusions.

The level of care required is likely to increase and medication might be required to help manage symptoms.

Late-stage or severe Alzheimer's

In the late stage of Alzheimer's the damage to your loved one's brain cells will have worsened to the stage where it will become very difficult for them to manage their own care. They will have lost most of their ability to respond to their environment making it very difficult to communicate.

with them, thus making it difficult for them to tell you if they are in discomfort or pain. Even basic physical functions such as walking, sitting or even swallowing will be difficult.

It might be the case that hospice care becomes the best option, in order to ensure that the individual's needs are met. You can still connect with your loved one through activities such as listening to music, reading to them, or helping them look over old photos. Reassurance through a gentle touch can also be very comforting.