FAMILY RESOURCE GUIDE

Stages of Alzheimer's

A family caregiver's guide to what changes, and what helps, at each stage

Three stages, and why they're only a guide

The Alzheimer's Association and the National Institute on Aging (NIA) describe Alzheimer's in three broad stages. The stages overlap, and the pace differs from person to person. On average, people live 4 to 8 years after diagnosis; some live as long as 20 (Alzheimer's Association).

Find the stage that sounds most like your person, then work through its checklist on the next page.

BEFORE SYMPTOMS

Brain changes begin	Early · mild	Middle · often the longest	Late · severe
10+ years before memory problems (NIA)	**4 to 8 years** on average after diagnosis; some live as long as 20 (Alzheimer's Association)		

Early stage

MILD

WHAT YOU MAY SEE

- Trouble finding the right word
- Forgets names of new people
- Misplaces valuables
- Repeats questions
- Harder to plan, organize, or handle bills

YOUR ROLE

- Care partner more than caregiver. They can still decide.
- Put legal, financial and end-of-life plans in place now, together.
- Find your own support early.

Middle stage

MODERATE · OFTEN THE LONGEST

WHAT YOU MAY SEE

- Confused about place or date
- Needs help choosing clothes and dressing
- Bladder or bowel accidents
- Up at night, sleeps by day
- Wandering, suspicion, repeated actions
- Restless in late afternoon or evening

YOUR ROLE

- Hands-on help and daily supervision.
- Simplify tasks; keep what they can still do.
- Line up respite before you burn out.

Late stage

SEVERE

WHAT YOU MAY SEE

- Little or no conversation
- Needs help with all personal care, around the clock
- Trouble walking, sitting, then swallowing
- Can't say when they're in pain
- Higher risk of infections, such as pneumonia

YOUR ROLE

- Comfort and dignity come first.
- Connect through music, touch and a familiar voice.
- Ask the doctor about hospice.

Brain changes can begin a decade or more before memory problems show (NIA). Some doctors use a seven-stage scale instead, the Reisberg Global Deterioration Scale. It covers the same ground in smaller steps, so don’t be thrown if your doctor says “stage 5.”

Caregiver checklist by stage

Check off what's done. Revisit this page at every change.

EARLY

- ☐ Financial power of attorney signed
- ☐ Health care advance directive signed
- ☐ Talked about their wishes for future care
- ☐ Agreed who pays the bills, with safeguards
- ☐ Family agrees who does what

MIDDLE

- ☐ Home safety check: stove, doors, medicines
- ☐ A wandering plan and ID they always carry
- ☐ Same daily routine, written down
- ☐ Respite lined up: family, adult day or in-home help
- ☐ Researched care options before a crisis

LATE

- ☐ Asked the doctor about hospice
- ☐ Asked about hospice respite (Medicare covers most of the cost for up to 5 days)
- ☐ Comfort plan: favorite music, touch, voices
- ☐ Grief support for yourself

Questions to ask the doctor

1. What stage do you think we're in, and what should we expect next?
2. Could any medicine or other condition be making the confusion worse?
3. What safety concerns should we deal with now?
4. Are there treatments or clinical trials that fit our situation?
5. What signs mean we need more help than we have?
6. When should we talk about hospice?

Taking care of the caregiver – plan a break before you need one

NEARLY **13M** Americans give unpaid care to someone living with dementia.

59% of them rate their emotional stress as high or very high (Alzheimer's Association, 2026).

Respite isn't giving up. It's short-term relief, from a few hours to several weeks, at home, at an adult day center or in a care facility (NIA). Most private health insurance doesn't cover it, though some long-term care policies may. Plan for it the way you'd plan a doctor's visit: before you need it.

Call for help, any stage

Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline
800-272-3900
Oregon chapter programs: alz.org/oregon

Council on Aging of Central Oregon, Family Caregiver Support
(541) 678-5483
Weekdays, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

Oregon Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC)
855-673-2372

Sources: Alzheimer's Association, "Stages of Alzheimer's" and "2026 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures"; National Institute on Aging, "What Are the Signs of Alzheimer's Disease?" and "What Is Respite Care?"; Oregon Department of Human Services, Family Caregiver Support Program. This guide is general information, not medical or legal advice. Talk with your loved one's doctor, and an attorney for legal documents, about what's right for your family.