

A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Understanding Dementia

What to Expect. How It Changes.
How Care Can Help.

When someone you love begins to show signs of memory loss, it's natural to feel a mix of concern, uncertainty, and questions about what comes next.

This guide explains what dementia is, how it may change over time, and how the right support can help each stage feel more manageable, meaningful, and dignified.

What Dementia Is (and What It Is Not)

Dementia is not a single disease. It's a general term used to describe changes in memory, thinking, reasoning, and behavior that interfere with daily life. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form, but other types include vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, and frontotemporal dementia.

Dementia is not the same as normal aging. Occasional forgetfulness or slower recall can be part of getting older. Dementia goes beyond that, affecting a person's ability to function safely and independently, communicate clearly, and manage daily routines.

Key distinction: While occasional forgetfulness is a normal part of aging, dementia represents a significant decline that progressively affects a person's ability to carry out everyday activities, maintain relationships, and live independently.

How Dementia Is Diagnosed

There is no single test for dementia. Diagnosis typically involves a combination of approaches, and for families, the process can feel slow or uncertain. That's normal — diagnosis is often about recognizing patterns rather than reaching instant conclusions.

Medical History

A thorough review of past and current health conditions, medications, and family history.

Physical Exams

Comprehensive physical and neurological examinations to assess overall health and function.

Cognitive Screening

Neuropsychological evaluations that test memory, language, problem-solving, and attention.

Laboratory Tests

Blood work and other lab tests to rule out treatable conditions like thyroid disorders or vitamin deficiencies.

Brain Imaging

CT scans, MRI, or PET scans when appropriate to look for structural or functional brain changes.

Ongoing Observation

Monitoring changes over time to identify patterns and track how symptoms progress.

"Understanding the diagnostic process helps families feel less alone and more prepared"

The Stages of Dementia

A General Framework

Many professionals use a seven-stage model to describe how dementia commonly progresses. This is a general guide, not a fixed timeline. People may move through stages differently, show overlapping symptoms, or move back and forth between stages.

● Early Stages

In the earliest stages, changes are subtle. A person may misplace items, forget names, or take longer to find words. These changes often don't interfere with daily life.

As mild cognitive decline develops, memory challenges become more noticeable to close friends or family. Planning, problem-solving, or managing complex tasks may feel harder, even though independence is largely intact.

● Middle Stages

As dementia progresses, daily routines become more difficult. Individuals may withdraw socially, feel frustrated or anxious, or need help managing medications, appointments, or personal care.

At this stage, cognitive effort often becomes more taxing than physical ability. This is when families frequently begin exploring memory care or additional support.

● Later Stages

In later stages, individuals need assistance with most daily activities. Communication and mobility may become limited, and care focuses on comfort, dignity, safety, and connection.

How Dementia Progresses

There is no set timeline for dementia. Progression depends on many factors, including the type of dementia, overall health, age, environment, and support systems.

“What remains constant is the value of consistent, compassionate care that adapts as needs change.”

Caring for Someone with Dementia

Caregiving often begins gradually and grows over time. Many families reach a point where they realize that love also means seeking support beyond what they can provide at home.

Choosing care is not giving up. It's choosing safety, connection, and specialized support.

How Aegis Living Supports Memory Care

Memory Care at Aegis Living is centered on the person, not just the diagnosis.

Our **Life's Neighborhood™** program supports residents through every stage of cognitive change with:

- Calm, thoughtfully designed environments
- Consistent routines and familiar rhythms
- Trained, compassionate care teams
- Life Enrichment programming that encourages engagement and connection
- Care plans that evolve as needs change
- Family support every step of the way

Even as memory changes, the need for respect, purpose, and joy remains.

Taking the Next Step

If you're beginning to explore memory care, you don't need all the answers yet. Learning what to expect and understanding your options is a meaningful first step.

We're here to help you think it through — at your pace.

Find a Local Community

Get your questions answered | Schedule a tour
www.aegisliving.com

Signs It May Be Time for More Support

Support needs often change gradually. Families may notice patterns such as:

- Daily tasks taking more time or effort
- Increased confusion or fatigue with routine decisions
- Missed medications or appointments
- Changes in mood, confidence, or social engagement
- Safety concerns, especially when alone
- Growing stress for caregivers trying to manage everything

Noticing these changes early allows families to plan thoughtfully and avoid decisions made in crisis.

Aegis Living

Assisted Living | Memory Care

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