**THE LATER STAGE OF DEMENTIA**

By the later stage of dementia, the condition will have a severe impact on most aspects of a person’s life. The person will eventually need full-time care and support with daily living and personal care, such as [eating](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/daily-living/eating-drinking), [washing and dressing](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/daily-living/washing-and-bathing). This support can be provided by care at home but is more often given in [a care home setting](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/help-dementia-care/care-homes-who-decides-when).

Symptoms of all kinds are likely to cause the person considerable difficulties in this stage, but [altered perception](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/perception-and-hallucinations) and physical problems are often the most noticeable. By the late stage, the symptoms of all types of dementia become very similar.

The later stage of dementia tends to be the shortest. On average it lasts about one to two years.

**Memory problems**

Many people with later-stage dementia will struggle with their memory of recent events. They may often think they are at an earlier period of their life (known as ‘[time shifting](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/perception-and-hallucinations)’). This can cause challenging situations, for example, if they ask to see someone who is no longer alive.

People with dementia in the later stages may also stop recognizing familiar places, objects, and people. A person may not recognize themselves in a mirror, nor a close friend or family member.

This might happen because they only remember how a person looked when they were much younger.

**Language difficulties**

If a person with later-stage dementia speaks more than one language, they may lose one of the languages they learned later in life. Eventually, they may only understand the language of their childhood.

A person’s spoken language may eventually be reduced to only a few words or lost altogether. They may also understand fewer words.

But people with dementia at this stage may still be able to understand gestures, facial expressions, and body language. They may also use [non-verbal communication](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/symptoms/non-verbal-communication-and-dementia) to express their feelings or needs.

**Changes in mood, emotions, and perceptions**

Changes in mood remain in the later stages of dementia. [Depression and apathy](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/apathy-depression-anxiety) are particularly common.

[Delusions and hallucinations](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/perception-and-hallucinations) (especially of sight and hearing) are most common in the late stage of dementia. They are not always distressing but they can explain some changes in behavior because the person’s perception of reality is altered.

People with later stage dementia often respond more to senses than words. They may like listening to songs or enjoy textures. For example, they may like the feel of different types of material.

**Changes in behavior**

The changes in behavior that can happen in the middle stage of dementia can also happen in the later stages.

[Aggression](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/symptoms/aggression-and-dementia) in the later stage of dementia is often a reaction to personal care. Someone may hit or push away those trying to help them or shout out to be left alone.

A person with dementia may have felt scared, threatened, or confused.

Restlessness is also very common. Sometimes the person may seem to be searching for someone or something.

**Physical difficulties in the later stages of dementia**

The physical changes of late-stage dementia are partly why the person is likely to need much more support with daily living. At this stage they may:

* walk more slowly, with a shuffle and less steadily – eventually they may spend more time in a chair or in bed
* be at increased risk of falls
* need a lot of help with eating – and so lose weight
* have difficulty swallowing
* be incontinent – losing control of their bladder and bowels.

A person’s reduced mobility raises their chances of blood clots and infections. These can be very serious or even fatal so it is vital that the person is supported to be as mobile as they can.

**How does dementia reduce life expectancy?**

Dementia reduces life expectancy in two ways.

First, some of the diseases that are closely linked to [Alzheimer’s disease](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/types-dementia/alzheimers-disease) and [vascular dementia](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/types-dementia/vascular-dementia), such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease can mean a lower life expectancy. For example, vascular dementia is closely linked to heart disease and stroke. A person with vascular dementia is at risk of dying at any stage of dementia, from one of these.

The other way that dementia reduces life expectancy is through the effects of severe disease.

By the later stages of dementia, a person is often very frail with a weakened immune response, likely to be spending a lot of time in bed and possibly having problems swallowing.

These all make them much more likely to develop other medical problems that can lead to death, such as infections (like pneumonia) or cardiovascular problems (like a blood clot in the brain or lungs).

This is why the later stage of dementia is often the shortest.