

DEMENTIA -Changes in the ability to live independently

As dementia progresses, changes to the brain occur that affect the way an individual thinks, acts and moves around.

Mini-Mental Score

30

25

20

15

10

5

Pre- Diagnosis

The first signs of dementia start.

- Names of new people may be forgotten.
- Items of value might be misplaced or lost.
- The affected person might start to become anxious in unfamiliar locations.
- The affected person will probably deny that anything is wrong if questioned.
- Other people may not notice anything is wrong yet.

Mild Dementia

MMSE 21-26

Memory problems become noticeable.

- Current events are forgotten.
- Complex tasks like doing the shopping become too difficult.
- Complicated interests and hobbies are abandoned.
- The affected person needs prompting to have a shower, groom hair.
- The affected person begins to withdraw from challenging situations.
- The affected person denies there is a problem.
- Behavioural Problems commence in this period.
- The affected person's mood appears flat.

Moderate Dementia

MMSE 10-20

Confused for most of the time. Can no longer survive without assistance.

- Unable to remember important things like the home telephone number, or the names of the grandchildren.
- Will not be able to say what the day/date/time/place is.
- Sleep disturbances.
- Early in this stage will be able to go to the toilet alone, but later on will need full assistance.
- May become agitated, isolated, sad, anxious.
- May begin to have delusions (mistaken beliefs) and think people are stealing from them, or that people are impostors.
- May become delirious with an infection.

Severe Dementia

MMSE less than 10

Sketchy memory of past life, but is largely unaware of recent events and experiences.

- Usually remembers own name but sometimes forgets husband/wife/partner's name.
- Unable to solve any problems.
- Will need help to go to the toilet at first, but will eventually forget how to use a toilet and become incontinent
- Will need full assistance to bathe, dress and groom self. May become afraid of having a bath.
- Will start to have trouble walking and becomes at high risk of having a fall.
- May start to have trouble eating and sometimes swallowing. If this happens will need to have their diet modified so that swallowing is easier.
- Delusions may continue. Hallucinations (seeing and hearing things that aren't really there) may be a problem.
- May be anxious, aggressive, agitated, depressed.
- May pace up and down constantly, go into other people's rooms, cry out or scream.
- Disturbed sleep may continue.

End Stage Dementia

MMSE = 0

The dementia has severely affected the brain so that the individual cannot do any of the things he/she used to do.

- Unable to talk anymore, may scream out at times.
- Only recognises spouse or regular caregivers sometimes.
- Incontinent of urine and faeces.
- Needs full assistance to eat and drink.
- Unable to walk, stays in a chair or bed all the time. At risk of pressure ulcers.
- May hit or bite when care needs to be done (resistive to care).
- Will have problems swallowing, the diet will need to be changed to purees and thickened fluids.
- May develop increasing numbers of infections, such as in the lungs (pneumonia) and urinary tract (kidneys and bladder).
- Will become increasingly frail.
- May lose weight despite receiving enough food and fluids.

References

Trajectory adapted from Feldman H. & Grundman M. Symptomatic treatments for Alzheimer's disease. In Gauthier S. (Ed) 1999 Clinical Diagnosis and Management of Alzheimer's Disease 2nd Edn. London: Martin Dunitz, and Volicer L, Hurley A. 1998. Hospice Care for Patients with Advanced Progressive Dementia New York: Springer Publishing Company.

Where to get further information and support:

Alzheimer's Helpline
1800 100 500 or
www.alzheimers.org.au
Dementia Advisory Services
Your General Practitioner

KEY

Behavioural problems may commence in this period and continue in various forms as the dementia progresses.

Placement in a residential care facility is often required from this time due to difficulty in managing behaviours like wandering. A palliative approach to care, that improves comfort and function and maintains quality of life is commenced.

The dying process and eventually death can occur at any time from the moderate stage of dementia onwards. It is very unpredictable, and depends on what other diseases a person has.

The Mini-Mental Score (MMSE) is a test used to determine the dementia diagnosis and changes to memory that are occurring.

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