

WHAT IS DEMENTIA?

Dementia is a word used to describe a group of diseases that damage the brain. It is not a normal part of aging but does become more common in older adults. It usually gets worse over time. The most common type is Alzheimer's Disease. Other types may be related to HIV or heart disease/stroke, and some types are treatable, such as those caused by thyroid disease, vitamin deficiencies, infections, and vision or hearing loss.

Early warning signs of dementia (**Mild** dementia):

- Memory loss that interferes with usual daily life (forgetting how to do familiar tasks)
- Difficulty solving problems or doing complex tasks
- Confusion about time and place
- Problems with words
- Misplacing things
- Worse decision making, poor judgment
- Less social interactions
- Mood swings and changes in personality
- In this phase, caregiver goals are meant to keep the person as **INDEPENDENT** as possible

Middle stage (**Moderate** dementia):

- Forgets events that just happened (short term memory); might forget events long ago (long term memory)
- Slowed speech and understanding
- Worsened sense of time
- Restlessness, pacing
- Loss of urine control
- Seeing things that aren't there, believing incorrect ideas
- Mood swings
- Worsened vision, hearing, sense of touch
- "Sundowning": agitation increases at end of day
- Making up stories to fill in memory gaps
- Loss of behavior control
- Wandering
- Repeating words
- In this stage, caregiver goals are meant to provide **SAFETY**

Late stage (Severe dementia)

- Unable to walk without help
- Loss of ability to speak
- Eating problems and weight loss
- Loss of urine and bowel control
- Severe memory loss
- Needs total care
- In this stage, caregiver goals are meant to provide **COMFORT**