



## Global Deterioration Scale Adapted for Families

### Staging Dementia:

Dementing illnesses average 7-10 years in length with many patients living as long as 20 years. Families always want to know what state of the illness their loved one is in, what comes next, and how long the person will live. While no one can answer the last question, the first two are a bit easier.

Most experts agree that there are up to seven stages of dementing illness. We can define each stage using tests, such as counting backwards by 7's or 5's. It is easier to look at the person's usual day to day function and make an estimate. The seven stages are:

1. **No cognitive decline**
2. **Very mild cognitive decline---Forgetful**
3. **Mild cognitive decline---Early confusional**
4. **Moderate cognitive decline---Late confusional**
5. **Moderately severe cognitive decline---Early dementia**
6. **Severe cognitive decline---Middle dementia**
7. **Very severe cognitive decline---Late dementia**

Select the category that fits your loved one best, most of the time.

#### 1. **No cognitive decline**

- The person seems normal to everyone
- There are no complaints of memory loss from the person
- Their functional abilities have not lessened

#### 2. **Very mild cognitive decline (occasionally referred to as mild cognitive impairment)**

- Changes in short-term memory
- Depression---may refuse treatment
- Conflict with others (marital conflict)
- Increasing frustration, increased anger
- Symptoms seen as willful or purposeful
- Problems with employers
- Refuses treatment for depression

**ElderCare at Home, Inc**

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### **3. Mild cognitive decline (Early confused stage)**

Losses or changes in the ability to:

- Manage employment
- Manage money
- Drive safely (gets lost, makes mistakes, fender benders)
- Shop and make change
- Plan vacations and trips
- Comprehend complex written materials
- Understand phone scams, ordering from catalogues, or subscribing to appropriate magazines may become a problem
- Chores, especially those with power implements (blowers, saws, gas tanks) become unsafe
- Social participation may change

### **4. Moderate cognitive decline (Late confusional stage)**

- Decreased time sense
- Cleaning
- Cooling
- Thermostat
- Withdrawal from complex tasks
- Loss of sense of “risk”
- Withdrawal from high stimulus activities and social activities
- Increased irritability and self-absorption
- Difficulty with planning
- High degree of awareness, yet may be denial
- Anger with lost activities
- Loss of sense of humor

### **5. Moderately severe cognitive decline (Early dementia phase)**

- Bathing---starts with resistance
- Catastrophic behaviors become more regular
- Grooming
- Selecting clothing (wears same clothing all the time, changes clothing frequently, odd combinations)
- Occasional problems with recognition of family
- Non-recognition of TV, mirrors, pictures, objects
- Personal withdrawal from activities and people
- Decreasing awareness
- Increased visual-perceptual deficits and recognition, complaints that glasses need changed

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- Sensitivity to noise, avoidance of groups
- Clings to caregiver
- Repetitive behaviors
- Decline in language ability
- Resistance to intimacy
- Child-like affect (Piaget in reverse)
- Pacing, wandering

#### **6. Severe cognitive decline (Dementia)**

- Toileting
- Ambulation (walking)---getting “glued” to the floor, falling, shuffling, coasting from object to object, difficulty rising from chair
- Toddler-like affect
- Eating with fingers

#### **7. Very severe cognitive decline (Late dementia or end stage)**

- Loss of ability to move about purposefully, i.e. pushing a wheelchair
- Loss of regular verbal communication
- Dependence in all activities of daily living
- Loss of recognition of family members except during moments of clarity
- Spontaneous behaviors, such as yelling
- Contractures, pathologic fractures, and joint immobility
- Complications of immobility and medical complications (weight loss, skin breakdown, repeated infections, aspiration)
- Falls from bed (rollouts or climb-outs)
- Return of primitive reflexes
- Seizures, additional neurological problems
- Needs to be fed

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