



When is it Time to Make A Move to Memory Care?



Your Family. Our Privilege.



ONE OF LIFE'S MOST CHALLENGING DECISIONS FOR FAMILIES

Overview

Families of loved ones who have been diagnosed with dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease, will eventually face a difficult decision: knowing when their loved one, often a parent or spouse, can no longer live independently either at home or in an assisted living community. The truth is, that when the family begins thinking about a transition, the journey towards memory care has already begun.

There are many reasons why making the move to memory care is difficult for families. Many cling to the hope that mom or dad can stay at home longer if given a bit more support. And yet providing that support can be draining on a family's emotional wellbeing as well as their finances. Equally challenging, however, is navigating through all the steps involved with making a transition to memory care, especially when the move is from the family home, full of so many memories.

It can be hard for families to take the many steps necessary to provide the level of support required to keep their loved one living his or her best life as the disease progresses.

This paper will focus on an overview of Alzheimer's disease, which is the most common form of dementia. It will also review the warning signs that indicate it is time to transition into memory care, what expertise and services memory care provides, and the pathway forward once the decision is made. Importantly, the insights offered in this paper are relevant to various forms of dementia.

REVIEWING THE DYNAMICS OF ALZHEIMER'S

Alzheimer's disease is more common than many people think. Today an estimated 6.7 million people in the U.S. are living with Alzheimer's. That number is expected to reach 12.7 million by 2050 (UsAgainstAlzheimer's).

There is a wealth of information and resources about Alzheimer's available on the Internet. Unfortunately, however, myths continue to prevail. Those myths can create roadblocks to taking necessary precautions and making decisions. Here are some of the most common myths (Pfizer):



- **Myth: All dementias are Alzheimer's disease.** Fact: Alzheimer's is the most common type of dementia accounting for 60-80% of all types. It is important to get testing completed to determine the exact type of dementia a person has. Understanding the type of dementia allows caregivers and clinicians to better understand what parts of the brain are being affected and what treatment plans can be put into place.
- **Myth: Memory loss and confusion is just a part of getting old.** Fact: While Alzheimer's is common, it is not part of normal aging. This is why it is so important to consult a doctor when memory loss begins to get in the way of daily life.
- **Myth: You can tell someone has Alzheimer's because they can no longer communicate and live in a nursing home.** Fact: Alzheimer's progression is gradual. Many people with Alzheimer's are still out in the world, many living on their own and managing their lives. Eventually, however, their cognition, along with physical health will decline.

Many People Don't Understand that Alzheimer's is a disease that progressively becomes more debilitating. Ultimately it is fatal.

Here is a brief review of the "Reisberg Stages", developed by Dr. Barry Reisberg:



Stage 1: No evidence of cognitive deficits.

Stage 2: No social or work issues but reports of memory problems, such as misplacing items or forgetting names.

Stage 3: Impaired concentration, difficulty with work tasks, some denial about deficits.

Stage 4: Trouble remembering personal history, reduced emotions, withdrawal from challenging situations, difficulty handling finances.

Stage 5: Some assistance required with activities of daily living, clear evidence of short-term memory loss and orientation, may begin to need help choosing what to wear each day.

Stage 6: Lack of awareness of recent activities and/or surroundings, need assistance with activities of daily living, behavior changes, incontinence, sleep disturbances.

Stage 7: Significant behavioral and personality changes, loss of speech and ability to converse, difficulty with movement and swallowing, unable to complete activities of daily living.

Dr. Tam Cummings, Gerontologist, also recommends using the DBAT (Dementia Behavioral Assessment Tool) for recognizing and assessing the 7 stages of dementia. The tool has multiple categories that can help family caregivers hone in on small changes that mark the progression of dementia.

WARNING SIGNS TO LOOK FOR FROM YOUR LOVED ONE

As an individual enters stage 4 and 5 of Alzheimer's, they will find certain things more difficult to manage. While in the early stages there are safeguards that can be put in place, ultimately dangers will increase. Here are the key warning signs families should look for as a loved one's dementia continues to impair their daily life (webmd) (usnews):



- Leaving the stove or water turned on, leaving the front door open or creating other safety hazards.
- Wandering off without notice and without a specific destination.
- Neglecting personal hygiene, such as bathing, brushing teeth, etc.
- Not paying their bills and expressing confusion as to why cable or the phone was turned off.
- Beginning to withdraw from things they have always enjoyed, including hobbies and social situations.
- A decline in physical health. They may become thin from lack of eating or develop a UTI, depending on the stage of the disease they are in.
- Marked changes in behavior. This may include becoming easily agitated or suspicious about those around them.
- Starting to fall. Falls occur as the brain damage increases.

WARNING SIGNS TO LOOK FOR IN FAMILY CAREGIVERS



Families often neglect to consider the emotional and financial challenges associated with caring for a parent or spouse who has become increasingly dependent upon them to handle activities of daily living and deal with the anxiety and agitation associated with dementia.

Here are warning signs to look for within the family:

- **Emotional drain.** This is due to the constant demands of caring for a family member with Alzheimer's. These demands may include de-escalating their anxiety, health issues, working to eliminate safety risks, and facing a series of unexpected behavioral issues (adxhealth).
- **Physical illness.** Family caregivers are more prone to illness and serious medical conditions. The Alzheimer's Association notes that 18% of spousal caregivers die before their partners (The Alzheimer's Association).
- **Financial strain.** Multiple doctor visits, paying part time caregivers to gain a temporary respite, having to take unpaid time off, all can drain resources, creating an untenable financial burden for families (adxhealth).
- **Social isolation.** The world of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's can become small and isolated. Family caregivers are faced with fewer opportunities to visit with friends and tend to put aside emotional and health needs. All can lead to even greater isolation (adxhealth).
- **Burn-out.** Ultimately, family caregivers of loved ones with Alzheimer's and other dementias are at a greater risk of anxiety, depression, and a reduced quality of life than those caring for individuals with other conditions (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

WHAT IS MEMORY CARE AND WHAT ARE ITS ADVANTAGES?



Memory care is an environment specifically designed to provide professional, compassionate care for individuals with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. Often, memory care is simply a separate floor or wing of an assisted living community. Some, however, are 100% dedicated to memory care. Memory care will offer all the same things as provided in assisted living communities. The difference is the additional care and services that are tailored to the special needs of the individual with dementia. Here are some things that a memory care community offers families:

- Caregivers and physicians who are certified to provide dementia care and highly trained to understand both the behavioral and physical manifestations of dementia, including Alzheimer's.
- A range of activities designed to meet the needs of each resident at each stage of the disease.
- Special floor plans that may include circular corridors to enable safe freedom of movement without the need to navigate multiple hallways.
- Safety features such as automatic locking doors, sensors and other technologies that safeguard residents without undue restraints.
- Dining programs that feature brain healthy meals and limit foods that can trigger added health issues.
- Purposeful programs and activities that optimize the physical, cognitive, and emotional health of residents and support retention of cognition for as long as possible.
- End of life care.

THE TIME TO PLAN IS NOW



It is never too early to prepare your loved one and family for a transition to memory care. As you begin this journey, here are some things you can do now to prepare for that transition:

- **Research.** Take the time to read up on topics associated with dementia. Gather links to trusted resources, such as The Alzheimer's Association. The Anthem Memory Care site also has a resource page which you can access at <https://anthemmemorycare.com/resources>.
- **Understand the options.** It is important to have a good understanding of options available to you. For a loved one in the earlier stages of dementia, you may want to consider options such as in-home care or daycare. Consider contacting a memory care provider to arrange for a respite stay to try out the community.
- **Financial considerations.** This is the time for families to gain access and ultimately control of the loved one's assets to make sure they are financially able to afford a move into memory care.
- **Treatment planning.** Alzheimer's is a brain disease. That means planning for care as the disease progresses just as you would with a diagnosis of cancer . This will ultimately include a transition into a secure environment with trained professional caregivers.

MAKING THE BEST DECISION FOR YOUR LOVED ONE AND YOUR FAMILY



Each individual living with Alzheimer's is as unique as the family they belong to. Every situation contains its own set of challenges, some more profound than others. Understanding that this is a journey not to be taken alone is a good starting point. Involving family members and trusted friends can help make the journey smoother and more effective for everyone, especially for the individual with dementia. That is why it is so important for families not to neglect their own needs as they work towards making a care decision for their loved one.

A transition to memory care is never easy. However, it is an important step in the lives of everyone involved. Individuals with dementia require a level of medical care and therapy that is optimized in a memory care environment. Memory care communities not only create a safe haven, but also alleviate the day-to-day care burden on families.

The sooner this transition is made, the easier it will be on everyone. That is because it will give the individual time to adjust before the illness enters its later stages. The socialization in these environments has been shown to slow the progression of the disease and improve emotional wellbeing. It will also give families the peace of mind that their loved one is being cared for and, when they visit, the focus can be on spending quality time together.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Below are additional resources you can use to conduct more research on senior care options:

<https://www.usagainstalzheimers.org/learn/alzheimers-crisis>

https://www.pfizer.com/news/articles/5_myths_about_dementia

<https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/stages>

<https://adxhealth.com/alzheimers-caregiver-challenges/>

<https://www.webmd.com/alzheimers/signs-time-memory-care>

<https://health.usnews.com/senior-care/articles/signs-its-time-for-memory-care>

<https://tamcummings.com>

<https://www.ncoa.org/adviser/local-care/memory-care/>