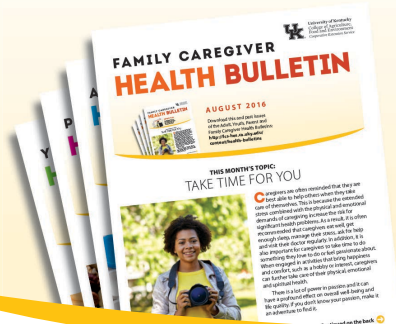




# FAMILY CAREGIVER

# HEALTH BULLETIN



**JULY 2017**

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<http://fcs-hes.ca.uky.edu/content/health-bulletins>

## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# UNDERSTANDING ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE



Caregiving can be a full time job, but it is one that can be made easier when you better understand what it is your loved one is experiencing by learning about the disease and knowing what to expect. According to the Alzheimer's Association, such knowledge can help a caregiver feel a greater sense of control and can help you plan ahead. Proper caregiver education includes learning healthy ways to manage stress and the importance of taking time for self-care.

Alzheimer's disease is a particularly important disease to learn about. It evolves over time, resulting in a need for caregivers to be flexible as caregiving demands increase. As a result, the Alzheimer's Association offers a variety of educational programs about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias to teach caregivers about the disease and associated behaviors, proper communication, practical caregiver approaches and resources.

While each person progresses through and experiences the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease differently, the following stages have been created to help people understand common symptoms associated with the trajectory of the disease. The Family Caregiver Alliance recognizes the changing role of the caregiver with the trajectory of the disease.

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# Disease stages<sup>1</sup> and associated caregiving responsibilities<sup>2</sup>

## Early-stage

- Trouble remembering words, names, faces
- Challenges with daily tasks (finances, cooking, shopping)
- Forgetting materials recently read
- Losing/misplacing things
- Increased trouble with decision-making and organization
- Withdrawn from social settings
- Trouble initiating activity
- May become disorientated in familiar places

### Early-stage caregiving responsibilities

- Learn about the disease to understand the stages and associated symptoms
- Learn to differentiate between the disease and your loved one
- Seek emotional support (caregiver support groups, counseling, family)
- Recognize caregiver stress (depression, chronic stress)
- Recognize and embrace family role changes (learn how to drive, cook or pay bills if a person with AD was the one who did these things)
- Make a short and long-term financial plan that includes the time and demands of a degenerative progressive disease
- Arrange for legal finance and medical powers of attorney

## Middle-stage

- Forgetting personal and family history
- Forgetting personal information (telephone number, address, graduation dates)
- Confusion with date and time
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Increased risk of wandering
- Personality and behavioral changes (moody, withdrawn, suspicious)
- Repetitive or compulsive behavior
- May start wandering
- May have trouble with bladder and bowels

### Middle-stage caregiving responsibilities

- Recognize that your role will expand to full-time duties
- Seek emotional support as later stage disease is often associated with social isolation, loss and grief
- Talk to a healthcare provider if you feel overwhelmed, depressed or anxious
- Take regular breaks. Ask for help. Seek respite.
- Create a safe home environment

- Develop a positive relationship with your loved one's healthcare providers and build a team approach when it comes to caregiving
- Take care of your own health (eat right, exercise, sleep, take time away)
- Plan for the future, including home and/or long-term and end-of-life care

## Late-stage

- Inability to recognize people, places, objects, surroundings
- Requires 24-hour care/assistance for daily activities
- Contracted muscles
- Inability to smile
- Difficulty communicating
- Weight loss/gain
- Increased time spent sleeping
- Changes in ability to walk, sit, eventually swallow
- Incontinence
- Vulnerability to infections ( pneumonia)

### Late-stage caregiving responsibilities

- Consider long-term care placement, which may be necessary for proper safety, management and supervision required of the late stages of the disease
- Engage hospice services at the end-of-life (less than 6-months to live) to help keep your loved one comfortable. Utilize their services, which specialize in helping families during and after a loss.

For more information on the risk factors and basics of Alzheimer's disease, contact your local Extension office. Extension is offering various programs in collaboration with the Greater Kentucky/Southern Indiana Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

#### REFERENCES:

- 1 Alzheimer's Association. (2017). Stages of Alzheimer's Disease. Retrieved May 15, 2017 from [http://www.alz.org/alzheimers\\_disease\\_stages\\_of\\_alzheimers.asp](http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_stages_of_alzheimers.asp)
- 2 Family Caregiver Alliance. (2017). National Center on Caregiving. Alzheimer's disease and caregiving. Retrieved May 15, 2017 from <https://www.caregiver.org/alzheimers-disease-caregiving>

**FAMILY CAREGIVER  
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