



DAY TO DAY DEMENTIA

Which stage is your loved one in?

A gentle, plain-language guide to the seven stages of dementia — so you can understand where your person is today, and what's worth focusing on now.

[Free Caregiver Guide](#)

A note before you begin

If you're reading this, you're probably worried about someone you love — and looking for a little solid ground. I've been there. My wife, Lori, lived with dementia, and for six years I learned most of this the hard way, one day at a time.

This guide won't diagnose anyone. What it *will* do is help you recognize roughly where your person is along the path, calm some of the fear that comes from not knowing, and point you to the one or two things that matter most at this moment.

Dementia doesn't move in neat steps. Think of these stages as a map, not a timetable — people move through them at their own pace, and skip around. Use them to orient yourself, not to predict a date.

How to use this guide

- Read through the seven stages and check the boxes that sound familiar.
- The stage where you check the most boxes is likely close to where your person is today.
- Read the “**Focus on now**” note for that stage — that's your next step.
- When you're ready, take the free 2-minute Stage Finder quiz for a more tailored result.

— Anthony

Important: This guide is for information and support only. It is not medical advice and is not a diagnostic tool. Only a qualified clinician can diagnose dementia or determine its stage. If you're noticing changes, please talk to a doctor.

How the seven stages work

Clinicians often describe dementia in seven stages, from before any symptoms appear to the final stage of the illness. The early stages are about **noticing and planning**; the middle stages are about **daily care and behavior**; the later stages are about **comfort, dignity, and support** — for your person and for you.

Stages 1–3 · Early

Subtle changes, or none yet.
The window to plan while your person can take part.

Stages 4–5 · Middle

Daily life is affected. Behaviors emerge. More hands-on care is needed.

Stages 6–7 · Late

Extensive care needs. The focus shifts to comfort and presence.

A word of reassurance

Wherever your person is, there is something you can do that helps — and you don't have to do all of it at once. The goal of this guide is to make the next step smaller and clearer, not to hand you the whole road at once.

On the next pages, each stage includes what you might be seeing and one focused next step. Check the boxes that ring true.

The earliest signs

1

Pre-clinical

No symptoms yet — this stage is about risk and awareness.

☐
☐
☐

No noticeable memory or thinking changes

You're here out of worry, family history, or wanting to lower risk

Interested in brain-healthy habits and what to watch for

Focus on now: Protect brain health (heart health, sleep, hearing, staying active and connected) and learn the difference between normal aging and a warning sign.

2

Very mild decline (forgetfulness)

Subtle slips that are easy to dismiss as "just aging."

☐
☐
☐
☐

Occasionally forgets familiar words or names

Misplaces everyday objects more than before

Small lapses that others may not notice yet

You've quietly started to wonder if something's off

Focus on now: Keep a simple log of what you're noticing, and consider a baseline check-up. Earlier answers mean more time to plan together.

When changes become clearer

3

Mild cognitive decline (MCI)

More than normal aging — but daily independence is largely intact.

- ☐ Noticeable trouble with names, words, or recent conversations
- ☐ Difficulty with planning or complex tasks
- ☐ Others are beginning to notice
- ☐ An MCI diagnosis may already have been mentioned

Focus on now: Follow up medically, and use this clear-headed window to set up legal and financial documents and have the important conversations — while your person can fully take part.

4

Mild dementia

Often when a diagnosis is made; daily life is affected.

- ☐ Forgets recent events; repeats questions
- ☐ Trouble managing money, appointments, or multi-step tasks
- ☐ Word-finding difficulty; some withdrawal or mood change
- ☐ Still independent in many ways, with support

Focus on now: Handle the few things that matter early — Power of Attorney, the driving question, simplifying finances and safety — and start a support habit for yourself.

The hardest day-to-day stretch

5

Moderate dementia

More confusion, more hands-on help, and new behaviors.

- ☐ Needs help with daily tasks like dressing or bathing
- ☐ Confusion about time, place, or familiar details
- ☐ Sundowning — more agitation or restlessness in the evening
- ☐ Wandering, repetition, or resistance to care
- ☐ Still mobile and active

Focus on now: Learn what actually helps with sundowning, agitation, and wandering; build a calm daily routine; and honestly ask whether it's time to add in-home help. This stage is where caregivers burn out — protect yourself too.

If you only do one thing this week

Pick the single behavior that's hardest right now — often sundowning or evening agitation — and change one thing about that time of day (more light earlier, a calmer routine, less stimulation). Small shifts here buy back real peace.

When care becomes round-the-clock

6

Moderately severe dementia

Extensive help needed; the care decisions get harder.

- ☐ Needs help with most daily activities
- ☐ May have incontinence
- ☐ May not consistently recognize close family
- ☐ Communication is more limited; more supervision needed

Focus on now: Weigh whether care at home is still safe and sustainable, and learn how to compare in-home care and memory care. If your person doesn't always know you — that's the disease, not a loss of the bond you share.

If you're carrying guilt about needing more help or considering a move, please hear this: choosing more care is an act of love, not a failure. You cannot pour from an empty cup.

The final stage

7

Severe / end-stage dementia

Comfort, dignity, and presence come first.

- ☐ Very limited communication
- ☐ Limited mobility; needs full-time care
- ☐ Changes in eating, drinking, or swallowing
- ☐ Sleeping more; withdrawing

Focus on now: Shift the goal to comfort. Learn what end-of-life signs are normal, when hospice can help, and how to simply be present. And know that the grief you may already feel is real and allowed.

You are not alone in this

This is the hardest chapter, and you don't have to navigate it without support. Hospice teams, grief resources, and other caregivers who understand are all within reach — and so are we.

What your answers might mean

Look back at where you checked the most boxes. That's a reasonable guess at where your person is today — and it points you to what's worth your energy now.

If mostly Stages 1–3

You have time and a clear-headed partner. Spend it on planning: legal and financial documents, the driving conversation, and brain-healthy habits.

If mostly Stages 4–5

You're in the daily grind. Spend it on routines, behavior strategies, and getting help in — before you burn out.

If mostly Stages 6–7

You're in the late chapters. Spend it on comfort, the right level of care, and support for your own grief.

One step at a time

You don't need to solve everything today. Pick the single most pressing item for your stage, take that one step, and come back for the next. That's how every caregiver gets through this — including me.

Your next steps

Get a more tailored result

Answer a few quick questions and we'll point you to the right starting place — plus a free guided meditation made for caregivers.

Take the free Stage Finder quiz

daytodaydementia.com/stage-finder

Free preview meditation

A short, guided moment of calm for caregivers.
daytodaydementia.com/free-meditation

Join Day to Day Dementia

Stage-by-stage guides, a full meditation library, and a community that gets it. daytodaydementia.com

Whatever stage you're in, you don't have to do this alone. I built Day to Day Dementia because I wished something like it had existed when Lori and I needed it.

— **Anthony Newell, Founder**

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for general information and emotional support only. It is not medical, legal, or financial advice, and it is not a diagnostic tool. The stages described are simplified and individual experiences vary widely. Only a qualified healthcare professional can diagnose dementia or determine its stage. If you have concerns about yourself or a loved one, please consult a doctor. © 2026 Day to Day Dementia, LLC.