

There is no fixed pattern of symptoms and no fixed speed of deterioration. People react differently but what is certain is that they will get worse. The following stages give a rough guide to the course of the illness.

■ Mild dementia

- ◆ Apathy: less interested in hobbies, activities and new things.
- ◆ More forgetful of details of recent events. More likely to repeat self and lose the thread of conversation. Routine, over-learned tasks are performed adequately.
- ◆ Less good at making decisions, planning and grasping complex ideas.
- ◆ More self-centred and less concerned for others and their feelings.
- ◆ More irritable and upset if they fail at something.

■ Moderate dementia

- ◆ Being very forgetful of recent events. Forgetting names of friends and relatives. Leaving saucepans and kettles to boil over. Being more repetitive. Memory for past events is usually good.
- ◆ Confusion over time and place – may wander off and get lost. Rapidly becoming lost if in unfamiliar surroundings.
- ◆ Being more clinging and emotional. Becoming angry, upset or distressed rapidly.
- ◆ Misunderstanding and misinterpreting situations eg, 'You are abandoning me', or 'they are stealing from me'. Occasionally hearing or seeing things that are not there.
- ◆ Being neglectful of hygiene or eating, saying that they have had a bath or a meal when they haven't.
- ◆ Less fluent in everyday conversation – word finding difficulties.

■ Severe dementia

- ◆ Memory is very poor, usually unable to remember for even a few minutes. Forget that they have just had a meal. Unable to find their way around. Shows poor recognition of friends or relatives.
- ◆ Often repeating one phrase or sound.
- ◆ Sometimes incontinent of urine and/or faeces.
- ◆ Needing help and supervision with feeding, washing, bathing, dressing and using the toilet.
- ◆ Being restless and sometimes aggressive, especially when feeling threatened or closed in.