

DEMENTIA

A SERIOUS ILLNESS



Planning for the future is important when you find out you have dementia. Planning early helps you complete documents that tell others about the care you want as dementia worsens.

People with a dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease, often live for years with disabilities that increase over time. Eventually, they become totally dependent on and cannot talk easily with others.

Quality of life is an important issue when making your health care decisions. Medicare covers voluntary planning discussions with your health care professional during the *Welcome to Medicare* preventive visit, your *Annual Wellness Visit*, and at other times when you need to have this discussion as part of your medical care. You may want to discuss planning documents, like a durable power of attorney for health care, or medical care decisions and their impact on your life. For example, people in the later stages of dementia might not want medical interventions, such as tube feeding.

Dementia is the fifth leading cause of death among adults age 65 or older. Experts say that signs of the final stages of Alzheimer's disease include:

- Being unable to move around without help
- Being unable to speak or be understood
- Needing help with most, if not all, daily activities
- Having eating problems such as difficulty swallowing or no appetite



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Types of Care Available



Palliative care can help you and your family member with dementia deal with symptoms and stress throughout the illness. “Family” can be people related to us and those we choose to call family.

Hospice services can be helpful in many ways to people in the final stages of dementia and their families. Hospice focuses on making people comfortable when they are expected to live six months or less.

People often choose hospice care late in the course of illness. This delays their ability to receive the comfort and dignity offered by hospice workers. Medicare, Medicaid, private health insurers, and the Veterans Health Administration generally provide hospice benefits for people who are not expected to live more than six months. Many who have lost family members wish they had asked for hospice sooner.

Many caregivers of those with dementia experience grief when their family members die. Hospice can help caregivers work through this and other emotions.

Resources

National Alzheimer’s Call Center

Alzheimer’s Association; Funded by the Administration for Community Living
800-272-3900 (Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.)
www.alz.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

General information about Alzheimer’s disease
<http://www.cdc.gov/aging/aginginfo/alzheimers.htm>

End of Life: Helping with Comfort and Care, Dementia at the End of Life

National Institute on Aging at the National Institutes of Health
<http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/end-life-helping-comfort-and-care/dementia-end-life>

End-of-Life Care: Alzheimer’s Caregiving Tips

National Institute on Aging at the National Institutes of Health
Tips about caring for a person with Alzheimer’s disease at the end of life
<https://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/publication/end-life-care>

Geriatrics and Extended Home and Community-Based Services

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Information on hospice and palliative care services available to veterans
http://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/Guide/LongTermCare/Home_and_Community_Based_Services.asp