

Dementia: Why Hospice Now?

What is happening

Dementia is a progressive illness that gradually affects:

- Memory
- Communication
- Movement
- Eating and swallowing
- Overall physical strength

Many patients have been living with dementia for years before hospice care becomes appropriate.

Hospice care is usually considered when the illness has progressed to its later stages and the body has become much more fragile.

Why health may be changing more quickly now

Even if memory or confusion does not seem dramatically different, the body may now be less able to recover from:

- Infections
- Hospitalizations
- Falls
- Other illnesses or physical stress

Events such as:

- Pneumonia
- Sepsis
- Recurrent infections
- Hospital stays

often accelerate decline in patients with dementia.

Each illness may lead to:

- More weakness
- Less mobility
- Increased sleeping
- Reduced recovery

Common signs of advanced dementia

As dementia progresses, patients may gradually experience:

- Spending most of the time in bed or a chair
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Difficulty sitting up or holding the head upright
- Speaking only a few words or becoming unable to speak
- Less facial expression or smiling
- Weight loss and decreased eating
- Recurrent infections

These changes are part of the natural progression of advanced dementia.

Why hospice can help

Hospice care focuses on:

- Comfort
- Symptom relief
- Support for caregivers and family
- Reducing unnecessary suffering

The hospice team can help with:

- Managing infections and symptoms
- Preventing discomfort
- Providing equipment and supplies
- Emotional and spiritual support
- Guidance through difficult decisions and changes

Important understanding

In advanced dementia:

- The body often becomes too weak to recover fully from new illnesses
- Repeated hospitalizations may become more burdensome than helpful
- Comfort-focused care may provide the best quality of life

Hospice care does not mean “giving up.”

It means focusing on comfort, dignity, and support during the final stage of illness.

When to discuss concerns with hospice

Talk with the hospice team if:

- Eating or swallowing worsens
- Infections become more frequent
- Weight loss increases
- Communication changes significantly
- You feel unsure what changes are expected

- You need emotional support or guidance
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