



UNDERSTANDING LATE STAGE DISEASE

As a health condition progresses to the later stages, issues may arise that have a negative impact on a person's abilities. Efforts to maintain mobility may no longer be effective. The focus is shifted from rehabilitation to support and comfort. The following is information on what may be expected for some conditions.

ALZHEIMER'S AND DEMENTIA

Alzheimer's and dementia are progressive conditions, and currently cannot be cured. People become increasingly frail due to the damage caused to the brain.

A person in the late stages may:

- be unable to speak
- be less aware of their surroundings
- gradually lose the ability to walk and move their limbs
- need help with bathing, toileting and dressing
- need help to eat and drink, and have swallowing difficulties
- sleep for longer periods

**For more info, visit:
www.alzheimer.ca**

HEART FAILURE

In the late stages of heart failure, the weakened heart is unable to meet the body's demand for oxygen.

- With less oxygen-rich blood, the heart tries to work harder causing increased levels of fatigue.
- Other problems may occur such as congestion in the lungs.
- Severe symptoms will include shortness of breath with exercise. Eventually, the shortness of breath becomes constant, even at rest. It becomes necessary to significantly limit physical activity.
- Difficulty walking and completing personal care tasks is common.

**For more info, visit
www.heartandstroke.ca**

PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Parkinson's is a progressive condition. Treatments focus on managing the symptoms of Parkinson's, which include tremor, rigidity, and slowness of movement.

A person in the late stages may:

- have severe stiffness which leads to gradual loss of movement and walking
- experience freezing episodes which worsen mobility and lead to increased risk for falls
- have memory loss, hallucinations, delusions, and anxiety
- need help with bathing, toileting, and dressing due to loss of mobility

**For more info, visit:
www.parkinson.ca**

CANCER

People with advanced cancer often experience troubling physical symptoms depending on the type of cancer and where it has spread.

Symptoms may include:

- nausea and vomiting
- loss of appetite, weight loss, dehydration
- fatigue
- difficulty breathing
- significant loss of muscle mass
- bone and/or nerve pain
- reduced ability to stand, walk, and manage personal care tasks

**For more info, visit:
www.cancer.ca**

PROGRESSIVE NEUROLOGICAL DISEASES SUCH AS MS AND ALS

In the late stages, there is advanced damage to the nervous system. The condition may decline steadily or it may stabilize for a period followed by a quick decline. Sometimes there is some recovery between flare-ups.

Symptoms may include:

- reduced ability to walk and move
- swallowing and breathing difficulties
- discomfort caused by muscle spasms or nerve pain
- confusion, anxiety, memory loss
- increased need for assistance with personal care tasks

**For more info, visit:
www.als.ca
www.msociety.ca**

LUNG DISEASE (COPD)

Reduced lung function results in low levels of oxygen and a build-up of carbon dioxide in the blood. Increased use of oxygen may be required. In the late stages of lung disease symptoms can be severe and limiting.

- Most commonly there is increased difficulty with breathing, becoming worse with each flare-up.
- The lungs become less efficient and lose ability to function.
- Any exertion, even just changing position, talking, or eating, might cause a person to feel out of breath and lead to activity restrictions.
- Assistance with daily tasks will likely be needed.

**For more info, visit:
www.lung.ca**

It is important to remember that people at the end stage of their disease will need extra care and emotional support to deal with the loss of their abilities. Every effort should be made to provide safety, comfort and reassurance as they cope with this difficult transition.