

ALZHEIMER'S VOCAB 101



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As you start your journey with Alzheimer's, you're bound to run into some unfamiliar words at doctor's offices, support groups and memory care facilities. Learning these medical and legal terms now may help better prepare you for the later stages.

Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)

The activities people need to do to function on a day to day basis, such as dressing, grooming, cooking, bathing etc. ADLs can be used to assess the progression of Alzheimer's disease throughout the stages.

Adult Day Services

Day programs offered by community centers or care facilities that give those with Alzheimer's a way to interact with others and remain active, while giving caretakers the ability to take some personal time.

Advance Directive (Living Will)

An important document for anyone with Alzheimer's to have. It informs family and healthcare professionals of a person's wishes for medical treatment in case of emergency. It's important to secure a living will as early as possible, since your loved one must sign this document while they still have the mental capacity to understand what they are signing.

Allowable Cost

The maximum amount that the state will pay for those on Medicaid. Other insurance plans may also have allowable costs.

Alternative and Complementary Therapies

Non-conventional techniques other than drugs that are used to manage pain and other ailments. These may include herbal remedies, exercise, meditation, reflexology, massage therapy, acupuncture and more.

Ambulation

The ability to walk.

Amyloid

A protein that forms plaques in the brains of those with Alzheimer's.

Amyloid Imaging

A PET (imaging) scan that takes images of amyloid plaques in the brain.

Apathy

A lack of emotion or interest that occurs during the mid and late stages of Alzheimer's.

Aphasia

The loss of ability to understand others' speech or express oneself.

Assisted Living Facility

A residential care home that provides housing, support, meals, assistance with daily living and recreational activities. Assisted living is best for those in the early to mid stages of Alzheimer's. An assisted living facility is different from a nursing home. While assisted living fosters independence for as long as possible, it does not provide the 24-hour monitoring needed during the late stages of Alzheimer's.

Bed-bound or Bed-fast

Someone who cannot get out of bed without aid. State assisted living regulations may have more specific definitions of this term related to assisted living.

Behavioral Neurologist

A physician who specializes in behavioral and memory disorders due to brain diseases such as Alzheimer's.

Behavioral Symptoms

Changes in behavior caused by Alzheimer's, such as wandering, apathy, depression, repetitive actions, sleep disturbances and aggression.

Beneficiary

A person designated in a will to receive all or some of an estate.

Binswanger's Disease

A type of dementia not caused by Alzheimer's, but by the effects of a stroke on the brain.

Case Management

The services provided by an Alzheimer's caseworker. A caseworker can help you plan for future care needs and locate services such as adult day care, community centers, respite services and more.

Clinical Trials

A research study that tests the effectiveness and safety of new treatments on volunteers. Through studies, researchers hope to find ways to slow, treat or prevent Alzheimer's.

Contractures

Loss of motion in the knees, elbows and hands due to shortening of the muscles. Contractures are common in late-stage Alzheimer's.

Custodial Care

Non-medical care that helps someone accomplish daily activities such as bathing, dressing, etc. (see ADLs). Because it is non medical, custodial care is often not covered by Medicaid, Medicare or other insurance plans.

Daily Plan

A daily routine that can help reduce confusion and stress for those with Alzheimer's and may increase happiness and enjoyment.

Decubitus Ulcers (Pressure Ulcers, Pressure Sores or Bedsores)

Skin sores caused by pressure that can occur in late-stage Alzheimer's.

Dementia

A chronic disorder of mental processes and behaviors. Dementia is not a specific disease, but a range of symptoms that may be caused by several different brain diseases, including Alzheimer's. Symptoms include confusion, delusion, sleep changes and other behavioral changes.

Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Order

A signed document telling medical personnel not to perform CPR or other life-saving procedures that restart the heart or breathing under certain circumstances. A DNR must be signed by a doctor based on the patient's wishes.

Early-onset

An uncommon type of Alzheimer's that affects those younger than 65, usually between the ages of 40 to 50.

Elder Law Attorney

An attorney who specializes in helping with estate planning, decision-making documents and end-of-life wishes. They may also be able to help with long-term planning such as finding nursing home care. You can find an elder law attorney through the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys or your local bar association.

Feeding Tube

A tube inserted through either the nose (nasogastric) or the stomach wall (PEG tube) that is used to give food and water to someone who is unable to eat or drink.

Financial Planner

A finance professional who can help you and your loved one organize your financial resources as you plan for the future.

Functional Impairment

The inability to perform daily tasks such as eating, dressing, bathing or using the restroom without assistance.

Geriatric Care Manager

A professional who can help create a care plan, explain services and find care options for your loved one.

Geriatric Psychiatrist

A psychiatrist who specializes in treating mental disorders in the elderly.

Guardian/Conservator

A person appointed by court order to manage a person's money and/or make healthcare and life decisions for that person.

Home Health Aides

Certified aides who help provide non-medical services, including ADLs, managing medication and aiding in household chores.

Hospice

A medical program designed to provide comfort and support for dying persons. The need for hospice must be granted by a physician, who determines that the person is in the last six months of life. Hospice is covered by Medicare and provides a full medical team, whether at home or in a senior living facility.

In-home Care

Care services that come to the home of the caregiver or person with Alzheimer's. These services vary and may include personal or medical care.

Medicaid

A government health program available to those with a low income who meet the qualification criteria.

Medicaid-certified

A certification that indicates that a facility can offer services to those who have Medicaid insurance coverage.

Medicare

A government health insurance program available to those with disabilities who meet the qualification criteria and those 65 and older.

Medicare-certified

A certification that indicates that a facility can offer services to those who have Medicare insurance coverage.

Memory Care (Facility)

Long-term residential care specifically designed to aid those with Alzheimer's and dementia. Memory care is not the same as assisted living, although an assisted living facility may also offer memory care. A memory care facility has extra features for safety and comfort that an assisted living facility does not. For example, memory care homes are typically secured to address residents with wandering behaviors.

Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE)

A brief test that measures a person's basic mental skills, including speaking, writing and memory.

Occupational Therapist (OT)

A therapist who helps patients adapt their approach, activities and environment to better help them eat, dress and bathe or maintain meaningful activities. They may also help advise family members.

Ombudsman

A professional advocate for residents in a residential facility, who helps facilitate resolutions to complaints from residents and families and helps uphold resident rights.

Palliative Care

Healthcare designed to ease pain and provide comfort to those with diseases that can't be cured.

Physical Therapist

A therapist who treats physical disabilities and helps patients improve their fitness and physical abilities. They may also teach patients how to use walkers, wheelchairs, etc.

Power of Attorney

A legal document that designates someone to make financial and/or healthcare decisions on your loved one's behalf.

Quality Indicators

Every nursing home in the US is scored using quality indicators, which are specific standards of care determined by the US government. You can find each nursing home's score on Medicare's Nursing Home Compare page.

Recreational Therapist

A therapist at a facility or day program that plans activities and helps attendees enjoy them.

Respite Care

A form of care that offers caregivers a break while providing care to loved ones. Respite care could be in-home help, a few days at a nursing home or an adult day care. It is often offered through community programs, which you can find through your [local Alzheimer's Association chapter](#).

Social Worker

Professionals who can help you and your loved one understand the disease, make care plans, explore options to manage symptoms and guide and counsel you throughout your journey.

Stages

A way to measure the progress of the disease – there are seven stages total. These stages are based on the [Global Deterioration Scale](#) and are often used by doctors to assess patients..

Sundowning

When Alzheimer's and dementia symptoms increase in the late afternoon and evenings.

Support Groups

A group where loved ones and caregivers can gather to find support, share their experiences and get and give advice.

Wandering

The act of getting lost and disoriented even in familiar places. As a person's memory deteriorates, this becomes more and more likely.