



FOR THE DAUGHTER WATCHING IT HAPPEN

When Your Parent Has Dementia, No One Tells You This Part

A stage-by-stage guide to what's happening, what
you might feel, and what you can do about it

There are a hundred guides out there telling you what
dementia does to your parent. This isn't that. This is what it
does to you, the daughter watching it happen.

**I support women watching their parent waste away
from dementia so they can stop feeling like a horrible
person.**

If you've had thoughts you're afraid to say out loud, this is for
you.

01 STAGE 01 The Noticing Stage

Before anyone says the word dementia out loud. You're seeing things that don't add up, but you're also the one making excuses for them.

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE

- He asks the same question twice in a conversation and you chalk it up to him not listening, or being tired
- She loses her keys or her glasses more than usual, and you both laugh it off as “getting older”
- He tells a story slightly wrong, a detail off, a name swapped, and you correct him without thinking much of it
- She seems a little more irritable or flat than usual, and you blame it on a bad week or being lonely
- He struggles to find a word here and there, and it feels like a normal “tip of my tongue” moment, not a pattern yet
- You notice the house is a little more cluttered or disorganized than it used to be, and you tell yourself it's just harder for them to keep up at this age
- A friend or sibling mentions something “off” about him or her, and you get defensive on their behalf, or dismiss it

WHAT YOU MIGHT FEEL

You feel a low hum of unease that you can't explain to anyone, including yourself. You start doubting your own read on things because everyone else keeps saying “she's fine, she's just getting older.” You feel a little crazy for being worried about something you can't prove yet. And underneath all of it, there's a quiet dread you're not ready to say out loud, because saying it might make it real.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Trust what you're seeing. You don't need proof or a diagnosis to take your gut feeling seriously. Write down what you're noticing, dates, specific moments, so you're not relying on memory or gaslighting yourself later. If someone dismisses your concern, you're allowed to bring it up again. You're not being dramatic. You're paying attention.

02 STAGE 02 The Diagnosis

Nothing about your parent has changed today, but everything has changed today. The word now exists.

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE

- You finally get a name for what you've been noticing, and there's a strange mix of relief (I'm not making this up) and devastation (it's real now) in the same breath
- Doctors talk in stages and statistics while your parent is sitting right there, still fully himself, still cracking jokes, and it feels surreal
- He may minimize it or refuse to accept it, insisting he's fine, which forces you into the position of pushing back on your own parent
- She might get quiet and scared in a way you've never seen her be, and you don't know how to comfort her because you're scared too
- Family group texts start, everyone processing differently, some in denial, some in panic, and you're suddenly managing everyone's reactions on top of your own
- You start googling at midnight, reading worst-case timelines, and can't unsee any of it

WHAT YOU MIGHT FEEL

Relief and grief hit at the exact same time, which is confusing and disorienting on its own. You feel numb sitting in that doctor's office, like you're watching yourself get the news instead of actually receiving it. Anger shows up too, maybe at the diagnosis itself, maybe at a sibling who isn't taking it as seriously as you are, maybe at nothing in particular. And there's a specific kind of loneliness here, everyone around you is grieving a future loss while your parent is still sitting right there, alive and mostly himself, and it's hard to know how to feel that.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Let yourself feel both things at once, the relief and the grief. You don't have to pick one. Give yourself permission to not have it together yet, you just got the news too. If your family is splitting into deniers and panickers, you don't have to manage everyone's reaction on top of your own. Pick one person, a friend, a therapist, someone, to say the unfiltered version to. You need somewhere to put this that isn't the family group text.

03 STAGE 03 Early Decline

She's still mostly herself. Still holding conversations, still recognizable as your mom, but you're starting to see cracks that are hard to explain away.

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE

- Amazon boxes start showing up that she doesn't remember ordering, or she buys the same thing five times because she forgot she already had it
- Costco or bulk bin situations, suddenly there are four jars of mayo or a dozen boxes of the same crackers
- Bills go unpaid, not because she can't afford them but because she genuinely forgot they existed, or she pays the same bill twice
- She tells you the same story almost word for word, sometimes twice in one phone call
- She gets defensive or snaps at you when you gently correct something she got wrong, which is new for her
- She starts avoiding situations where she used to shine, skipping book club, turning down invitations, because she's noticing something is off even if she won't say it
- She loses track of a recipe she's made a hundred times, or burns something because she walked away and forgot it was on the stove
- She repeats a question five minutes after you already answered it, and gets irritated if you point that out
- Small navigation slips, missing a familiar turn, forgetting which exit, in a place she's driven her whole life
- You start noticing money moving strangely, an unfamiliar charge, a donation to something sketchy, and it plants the first seed that the credit cards might need to come away eventually, even though you're not ready to have that fight yet

WHAT YOU MIGHT FEEL

This is where the guilt really starts moving in. You feel guilty for snapping at her when she repeats herself for the third time. You feel guilty for not calling as much as you “should,” especially if you're the daughter who lives far away or has a demanding job. You start resenting the disease itself, and maybe resenting your parent a little too, even though you know that's not fair, and that unfairness makes you feel worse. You're also starting to feel the exhaustion of being the one who notices everything, the one who has to bring it up, the one everyone else looks to for the read on how bad it's gotten.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The guilt you feel when you snap at her doesn't mean you're a bad daughter, it means you're a tired human watching someone repeat herself for the tenth time. Let that be true without punishing yourself for it. If distance or work makes daily involvement impossible, decide what you can actually offer and say it plainly to your family, instead of silently feeling guilty for what you can't. When the credit card or keys conversation starts brewing, start it early and honest instead of waiting for a crisis to force your hand. “I love you, and I need us to talk about this before something happens, not after.”

04 STAGE 04 Middle Stage

This is usually where real help becomes non-negotiable, and where a lot of the ugliest guilt shows up because outside care often enters here.

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE

- Personality changes that genuinely scare you, a gentle parent becoming paranoid or accusatory (accusing you or a caregiver of stealing), or a reserved parent saying inappropriate things in public
- She may accuse you of things that aren't true, like hiding her purse or "trying to put her away," which feels like a knife even though you know it's the disease talking
- Getting lost in places that used to be second nature, her own neighborhood, the hallway to the bathroom in her own house
- Needing help with things she'd be humiliated to need help with, bathing, dressing, using the bathroom, and often resisting that help hard
- Day and night getting confused, up at 3am convinced it's time to make breakfast
- Wandering, or trying to "go home" even when she's already home
- Hoarding or hiding items, food under the bed, tissues stuffed in drawers, her own belongings hidden from herself
- Words disappearing mid-sentence, or the wrong word coming out entirely (calling a fork a "hair thing")
- The keys conversation happens, either because of a near miss, a fender bender, or a fed-up call from a neighbor, and it's one of the first times you have to actively take something away from a parent instead of just helping them
- Credit cards and bank accounts often get locked down or handed over here too, sometimes because of confusion, sometimes because they've become an easy target for scammers, and taking that control away can feel like stripping them of their independence even when you know it's necessary
- This is often when the family has "the conversation" about moving her or bringing in outside help, and it's often the parent who fights it hardest

WHAT YOU MIGHT FEEL

This is often the most emotionally brutal stage, because it's the one where you have to become the parent to your parent. Taking the keys, taking the credit cards, these aren't just logistics, they gut you. You feel like you're stealing his dignity even while you know you're protecting him. You feel shame for wanting a break, for wanting your own life back, for resenting a sibling who doesn't live close enough to help carry this. You feel guilty every time you consider outside help, like needing help means you're failing her. And when he accuses you of stealing or lying, it doesn't matter that you know it's the disease talking, it still lands like a knife.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

This is the stage where you have to actively let go of the idea that you can do this without help. Needing outside care isn't a failure, it's the only way this is sustainable. Say the sentence out loud to whoever needs to hear it: "I can't do this alone, and I'm not going to try to." If a sibling lives too far to help physically, get specific about what they can do instead, money, research, calls, so resentment doesn't sit there unspoken. When he accuses you of something untrue, you're allowed to remind yourself in the moment, that's the disease, not him, and still walk away and cry in your car. Both things can happen.

05 STAGE 05 Late Stage

Usually the hardest stretch. The parent you knew is harder to find in the person in front of you.

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE

- Speech goes, sometimes gradually, sometimes it feels sudden, and you're left not knowing if he still understands you even though he can't respond
- She may stop recognizing you, or recognize you but not know how, calling you by a sibling's name or thinking you're her own mother
- Mobility declines, a wheelchair or bed-bound, and physical care becomes constant, feeding, changing, positioning
- He may not react to things that used to bring him joy, or he might have flashes of the old him, a laugh, a familiar phrase, that gut you in a different way
- She may become physically resistant to care, flinching or fighting caregivers even though it's for her own good
- Swallowing difficulties often start here, which brings up terrifying conversations about feeding tubes and comfort versus intervention

WHAT YOU MIGHT FEEL

There's a specific kind of grief here that doesn't look like grief, because she's still alive. You mourn someone who is still breathing in front of you, and that's a strange, lonely kind of loss nobody prepared you for. You may feel relief when you get a break from visiting, and then feel disgusting for feeling relieved. You feel torn constantly, between your job, your own kids, your marriage, and a parent who needs you in a way that has no bottom. Some days you feel numb just to survive it. Some days a single flash of the old him breaks you open completely.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

You're allowed to grieve someone who's still alive. That's not morbid, it's honest, and naming it out loud usually brings relief instead of guilt. If you feel relief on the days you don't have to visit, let that be information, not evidence that you're a bad daughter. Protect something in your life that has nothing to do with this, a friendship, a hobby, your own kids, even a small piece of it, because you cannot pour from empty and this stage will ask everything of you if you let it.

06

STAGE 06 End of Life

The final stretch, days to weeks.

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE

- The body starts actively shutting down, sleeping most or all of the time, barely eating or drinking
- Breathing changes, longer pauses, a rattling sound that's disturbing to hear even when you know it's normal
- He may have moments of surprising lucidity, a sentence, a squeeze of the hand, that feel like a gift and a gut punch at once
- Hospice, if involved, starts having very direct conversations about what's coming and when
- You're now watching a clock you can't control, waiting for something you both dread and, if you're honest, sometimes wish would just happen already

WHAT YOU MIGHT FEEL

Here it is, the thing almost nobody says out loud: you may find yourself praying for it to be over. Not because you don't love her. Because you love her so much you can't stand watching her suffer anymore. That prayer comes with a shame so heavy you might never tell a single person you had it, until maybe right now, reading this. You feel anticipatory grief crashing into relief crashing into guilt for feeling relief, sometimes all in the same hour. And when it finally happens, there's often a strange quiet, not just sadness, but the specific exhaustion of a fight that's finally, mercifully, done.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you've prayed for it to be over, you are not a monster, you are a daughter who loves someone too much to watch her suffer. That prayer is love wearing an exhausted face. Let yourself say it to someone, even just once, even just to me. When it happens, you don't have to perform grief a certain way. However you feel in that moment, numb, relieved, shattered, angry, is the right way to feel.



Information about dementia and Alzheimer's is everywhere. What to expect, what to ask for, what to do next, you can find all of it with a Google search. But none of that helps when you're this overwhelmed and this stretched thin every single day. When you're under that much pressure, you can't actually use the information in front of you, you're just trying to survive the day.

That's the part I help with. Not more information, but actual relief from the overwhelm and the pressure, so you can finally think clearly and show up the way you actually want to.

If you're ready for that kind of relief,

book a call with me

Let's talk about what this could look like for you.

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