

## **The final stages of Alzheimer's disease**

Caring for the patient with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia can create unique challenges. In many cases the caregivers have been grieving physical, cognitive, and behavioral regression for years. As your loved one's serious decline becomes more evident, the specialized skills and understanding that Meridian Hospice caregivers possess can provide the necessary assistance needed during this difficult time.

At this stage in the progression of Alzheimer's disease, a patient can no longer communicate directly, is totally dependent for all personal care, and is generally confined to bed. They are now completely dependant on their caregivers to advocate, connect, and attend to her needs.

### **Managing pain**

Patients with Alzheimer's disease can still communicate discomfort and pain. Pain and suffering cannot be totally eliminated, but you can help make them tolerable.

Managing pain and discomfort requires daily monitoring and reassessment of subtle nonverbal signals. Slight behavioral changes can signal unmet needs. Communicating written observations, times, and events to your medical team will provide valuable clues about your loved one's pain status. The soothing properties of touch, massage, music, fragrance, and a loving voice can also reduce pain. Meridian Hospice offers traditional approaches to pain management in addition to many complementary therapies.

### **Connecting and loving**

Even when patients cannot speak or smile, their need for companionship remains. The patient can no longer recognize you, but may still draw comfort from your touch or the sound of your voice.

- Staying calm and attentive will create a soothing atmosphere and communicating through sensory experiences such as touch or singing can be reassuring to your loved one.
- Contacts with pets or trained therapy animals can bring pleasure and ease transitions for even the most frail.
- Surrounding a loved one with pictures and mementos, reading aloud from treasured books, playing music, giving long, gentle strokes, reminiscing, and recalling life stories promote dignity and comfort all the way through life's final moments.

Meridian Hospice is committed to making these final stages of your loved one's disease process a comfortable one while providing you with the tools necessary to care for your loved ones individualized needs.