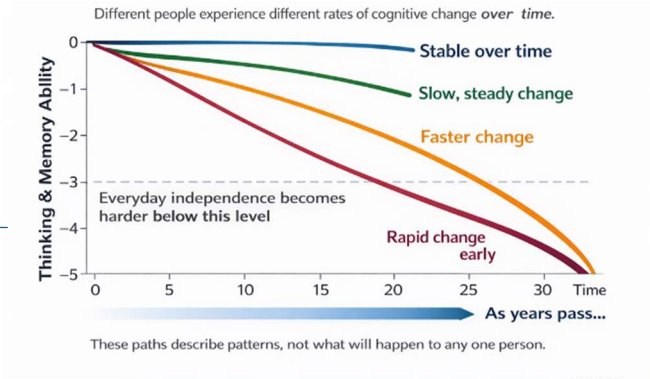
Ochsner Health

Ochsner Neurocognitive Program

What Is Likely to Happen Next?

After a diagnosis or evaluation, one of the most common questions is what to expect moving forward. Cognitive change does not follow a single path. This handout outlines the most common trajectories clinicians see over time.



Three Common Paths Forward

Stability

Some individuals experience little to no meaningful change over time.

- Symptoms may remain the same for months or years
- Daily function stays largely intact

Stability is common, especially when sleep, mood, medications, and medical conditions are optimized.

Gradual Change

Some people experience slow, stepwise changes over time.

- New difficulties emerge gradually
- Support needs increase slowly

This is the most common pattern. Change often occurs in phases, with periods of stability in between.

More Rapid Change

A smaller number of individuals experience faster progression.

- Functional changes become noticeable over shorter periods
- Support needs increase sooner

Even in this path, the rate can vary, and periods of stability may occur.

These paths describe patterns over time,

not predictions for any one person.

Key Points

Many factors affect how cognition changes over time, including:

- The underlying cause of cognitive impairment
- Overall medical and vascular health
- Sleep, mood, and stress
- Level of support and structure
- Engagement in brain-healthy behaviors
- No single test or visit determines the path forward

Your care team will revisit this conversation over time as more information becomes available.

Learn More?

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Understanding Prognosis in Cognitive Disorders

What Does Prognosis Mean?

Prognosis describes **how a condition is likely to change over time**.
In neurodegenerative diseases, this reflects a gradual change in brain networks rather than a sudden decline. Most conditions:

- Progress **slowly over years**
- Affect different abilities at different times
- Vary from person to person

General Life Expectancy Context

- U.S. average life expectancy is ~76 years
- Mortality cluster around the mid-to-late 80s, not into their 90s
- Mortality increases sharply after age 85
- Only a minority live into their 90s, but they raise the average

Neurodegenerative diseases shorten this trajectory, but **many people live for years after diagnosis**

Life Expectancy (Averages)

- Alzheimer's disease: **~8–12 years**
- Lewy body dementia: **~5–8 years**
- Parkinson's disease dementia: **~5–10 years**
- Frontotemporal dementia: **~6–10 years**
- Vascular / mixed dementia: **~5–10 years**

Overall: most people live ~5–12 years after diagnosis

What to Expect Life Expectancy (Averages)

- **Early (1–3 yrs):** Mild symptoms, mostly independent
- **Middle (3–7 yrs):** Needs help with daily tasks
- **Late (5–12+ yrs):** Increased dependence, physical changes

What Affects Progression

- **Faster decline:** poor nutrition, sleep issues, illness, hospitalizations
- **Slower decline:** exercise, structure, social engagement, strong support

Key Points

- Progression is gradual and variable, **not sudden**
- The specific disease and syndrome matter in determining trajectory
- Most live ~5–12 years after diagnosis, but this overlaps with typical life expectancy
- Neurodegenerative disease may shorten lifespan, but many live meaningful years after diagnosis
- Many factors are modifiable (health, environment, support) and influence day-to-day function
- Quality of life can be maintained for years

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What Can We Control Right Now?

Foundations of Brain Health and Neurocognitive Longevity

While not all causes of cognitive change can be reversed, **brain health can be supported at every stage**. This framework highlights four foundational areas that influence cognition, daily function, and quality of life—whether someone is experiencing normal aging, mild cognitive impairment, or dementia.

Learn More?

How the Four Foundations of Neurocognitive Longevity Work Together

Education & Understanding

Shared knowledge reduces uncertainty and supports informed decision-making over time.

- Build a shared understanding of cognitive change over time
- Support informed decisions and proactive planning

Brain Stimulation & Physical Exercise

Movement and mental engagement strengthen brain networks, balance, mood, and daily function.

- Encourage regular movement suited to ability
- Support mental engagement through purposeful activity

Relaxation, Sleep, & Restoration

Restorative sleep and stress reduction support memory, emotional regulation, and brain recovery.

- Promote consistent, restorative sleep routines
- Reduce stress to support memory and emotional regulation

Diet, Energy, & Metabolism

Nutrition and metabolic health provide the energy the brain needs to function and adapt.

- Emphasize whole foods, hydration, and balanced nutrition
- Support stable energy and metabolic health for the brain