



## The Slow Detour: Altered Decision-Making in Early Alzheimers

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### Description

Decision making is a central part of daily life, embedded in every action, from choosing what to eat to responding in conversation. In the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, one of the more disruptive changes involves how decisions are formed and acted upon. These shifts often go unnoticed at first, camouflaged as indecisiveness or momentary distraction. Over time, however, they begin to shape routines, interactions, and independence in ways that affect both the person living with the condition and those around them.

Many individuals begin to hesitate more frequently, particularly when asked to choose between options. This could be as simple as selecting an outfit or deciding what to have for lunch. Where once such tasks required no special thought, they now trigger internal loops of uncertainty. The person may ask the same question multiple times, revisit previous answers, or defer choices altogether. These behaviors are not due to laziness or passive habits; they reflect a real change in cognitive processing that makes even small decisions feel overwhelming.

One contributing factor is a reduced ability to weigh outcomes. Alzheimer's affects the parts of the brain that allow people to assess risk, anticipate consequences, and compare alternatives. For instance, deciding whether to go to a social event involves multiple layers: evaluating time, effort, interest, weather, and social expectations. As Alzheimer's progresses, this kind of multi-step thinking becomes less automatic. What once felt like a natural response now requires more effort and often results in avoidance.

Planning ahead also becomes more difficult. People may start tasks without considering what they'll need, or begin errands only to abandon them halfway through because something essential was forgotten. Scheduling becomes a challenge, even for familiar activities. They might arrive at the wrong time, miss appointments, or double-book themselves without realizing. The structure of daily life begins to loosen, sometimes imperceptibly, until patterns become noticeably inconsistent.

Emotional responses to these difficulties vary. Some individuals feel frustration, aware that something has shifted but unable to name

it. Others experience guilt for depending more on those around them. Repeated apologies, requests for reassurance, or excessive deferring to a spouse or caregiver are common. These reactions reflect not only cognitive change but a strong desire to remain involved, even when the process of involvement has changed.

Technology may offer assistance in some cases. Digital reminders, alarms, and simplified scheduling apps can support decision-making without removing control. Still, these tools require guidance and patience during adoption. What is intuitive to one person may feel foreign to another, especially as cognitive processing changes. Any tool must be introduced with sensitivity to the person's comfort level and capacity for adaptation.

Healthcare professionals sometimes use structured assessments to evaluate decision-making abilities, especially if the person is living alone or handling finances. Legal and ethical considerations become relevant when poor decisions begin to place the individual at risk. The line between independence and vulnerability is not always clear, and decisions about guardianship or financial oversight must be made carefully and with respect for dignity.

### Conclusion

Despite these challenges, many individuals continue to contribute meaningfully to their households and communities. Their roles may shift, but their presence and values remain strong. What matters is not only what decisions they can make independently, but how they are supported in remaining part of the process. Trust, patience, and flexibility on the part of family and caregivers are essential to maintaining that involvement. Decision-making is more than a function of intellect; it is part of personal identity. When Alzheimer's affects this capacity, it does not erase the individual's preferences or intentions. It simply means that those preferences may need to be approached differently. With care and attention, decisions can still reflect the values and desires of the person, even if expressed through quieter or more simplified means.