



Hints a loved one may need memory support services

Dementia is a brain and memory disorder that seriously affects a person's lifestyle and behavior, including difficulty doing familiar tasks such as cooking, driving and paying bills on time. There may be a change in personality, problems with language, forgetting common words, or disorientation and frequently getting lost. While memory is often impaired, memory loss doesn't always mean dementia.

Alzheimer's Disease (AD) is the most common form of dementia among older people; it involves the part of the brain that controls thought, memory and language. It's progressive and degenerative. This disease usually begins after age 60, risk goes up with age, and nearly half of those over 85 have symptoms. However, researchers remind us AD isn't a normal part of aging. Scientists have discovered that in people with AD, nerve cells die in the areas of the brain relating to memory, which affects cognitive functioning and lowers levels of the chemicals that carry messages back and forth between nerve cells. Research hasn't fully disclosed the causes of AD.

Knowing what to look for

When you see a loved one only on holidays and special occasions, it may be harder to detect problems. Couples often cover for one another, and when the family visits irregularly, it's easy to miss the changes. Mental deterioration has "patterns of consistent neglect," according to *The Complete Eldercare Planner*.

Things to watch for in your loved one include:

- Issues with walking, talking, eating, dressing and managing medications
- Unkempt appearance
- Decline in bathing and personal grooming
- Accumulating stacks of mail
- Unpaid bills
- Appetite changes
- Curtains drawn all the time
- Lack of interest in friends or activities
- Depression
- Abuse of alcohol
- Loss of reasoning skills
- Loss of short-term memory
- Forgetting how to do simple things
- Wandering
- Incontinence
- Sleeplessness

Experts suggest you seek help, but not jump to conclusions. If several of these things are going on with your loved one, you might make an appointment and talk to their doctor to see if medications or a medical condition could be causing the unusual behavior. Dementia may be caused by stress, depression, nutritional deficiencies, Parkinson's Disease or other illnesses. When help is clearly needed, go with your loved one to seek a professional evaluation.

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Further information is available online at:

alzfdn.org	Alzheimer's Foundation of America
alfa.org	Assisted Living Federation of America
bhshealth.org	Benedictine Health System
nia.nih.gov/alzheimers	National Institute on Aging's Alzheimer's resource
seniorresource.com	The "E-cyclopedia" of senior housing options and information for retirement, finance, insurance and care