



11 key signs that *might* indicate dementia in an elderly person.

Crucially, experiencing one or two of these occasionally doesn't necessarily mean dementia, but noticing several of them persistently and progressively worsening warrants a medical evaluation.

1. **Memory Loss Disrupting Daily Life:** Forgetting recently learned information is the most common early sign. This goes beyond occasional forgetfulness. Examples: Asking the same question repeatedly in a short time, relying heavily on memory aids or family for things they used to handle themselves, forgetting important dates/events.
2. **Challenges in Planning or Solving Problems:** Difficulty developing and following a plan or working with numbers. Examples: Trouble following a familiar recipe, keeping track of monthly bills, concentrating for long periods, taking much longer to do things than before.
3. **Difficulty Completing Familiar Tasks:** Struggling to complete routine tasks at home, work, or leisure. Examples: Trouble driving to a familiar location, managing a budget, remembering the rules of a favorite game.
4. **Confusion with Time or Place:** Losing track of dates, seasons, and the passage of time. May forget where they are or how they got there. Examples: Thinking it's morning when it's evening, getting lost on their own street, not knowing what month or year it is.

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5. **Trouble Understanding Visual Images and Spatial Relationships:** Vision problems can be a sign (not just cataracts). Examples: Difficulty reading, judging distance, determining color or contrast, which may cause problems with driving. May misplace things because they don't "see" them.
6. **New Problems with Words in Speaking or Writing:** Struggling to follow or join a conversation. May stop in the middle of a conversation and have no idea how to continue or repeat themselves. Examples: Trouble finding the right word (calling things by the wrong name, e.g., "hand clock" for watch), struggling with vocabulary, repeating stories word-for-word within minutes.
7. **Misplacing Things and Losing the Ability to Retrace Steps:** Putting things in unusual places and being unable to go back over their steps to find them. Examples: Putting keys in the refrigerator, accusing others of stealing when they can't find things (which may occur more frequently over time).
8. **Decreased or Poor Judgment:** Changes in judgment or decision-making. Examples: Poor judgment with money (giving large sums to telemarketers), paying less attention to grooming or cleanliness, dressing inappropriately for the weather.
9. **Withdrawal from Work or Social Activities:** Withdrawing from hobbies, social activities, work projects, or sports. Examples: Removing themselves from social engagements they used to enjoy, having trouble keeping up with a favorite sports team or hobby, avoiding being social because of the changes they are experiencing.

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10. **Changes in Mood and Personality:** Mood and personality changes, especially becoming confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful, or anxious. May be easily upset at home, with friends, or when out of their comfort zone. Examples: Becoming unusually anxious, fearful, suspicious, irritable, or apathetic.

11. **Increased Anxiety, Agitation, or Apathy:** Significant changes in baseline temperament. Examples: Becoming easily agitated in situations that didn't bother them before, seeming unusually passive or indifferent (apathy), exhibiting repetitive behaviors like pacing or hand-wringing.

Essential Considerations:

- **Progression:** Dementia symptoms are *progressive*, meaning they gradually worsen over months or years.
- **Impact:** These changes significantly interfere with independence and normal daily functioning.
- **Not Normal Aging:** While some mild forgetfulness can occur with age, the signs above go beyond typical "senior moments."
- **Other Causes:** Many of these symptoms can be caused by other treatable conditions like depression, vitamin deficiencies (especially B12), thyroid problems, infections (like UTIs in the elderly), medication side effects, or hearing loss. **This is why seeing a doctor is VITAL.**

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- **Sudden Changes:** If symptoms appear *very suddenly* (over hours or days), seek medical attention immediately as this could indicate a stroke, delirium, or other acute illness.

What to Do if You Notice These Signs:

1. **Don't Panic:** One sign alone isn't diagnostic.
2. **Observe Carefully:** Note specific examples, frequency, and progression.
3. **Talk Gently:** Have a compassionate conversation with the person about your concerns.
4. **See a Doctor Promptly: This is the most crucial step.** Start with their primary care physician. A comprehensive evaluation (including physical exam, cognitive testing, blood tests, and possibly brain imaging) is needed to determine the cause and rule out treatable conditions. Early diagnosis allows for better management, planning, and access to treatments or clinical trials.

Early detection and intervention are key to managing dementia effectively and planning for the future. If you have concerns, don't hesitate to seek professional medical advice.

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