

WE CARE

Seeing certain changes in your loved one as he or she ages can be confusing and frightening for you. We hope that the information discussed here is useful in your care planning. If you would like to discuss these issues further, please call the Care2Caregivers helpline. Our dedicated, professional staff members, who have also been family caregivers, are here to listen and guide you.



WHEN YOU CARE • WE ARE THERE

For more information:

Comprehensive Services on Aging (COPSA) has been providing compassionate and sensitive mental health care to the elderly since 1975. A team of Geriatric Psychiatrists, Social Workers and Case Managers are available to assist families with diagnosis and treatment. COPSA also provides training for professionals, family caregivers and the community on issues related to aging, memory and mental health. Care2Caregivers provides resources, referrals, information and supportive counseling to anyone caring for someone with memory loss. Call for help.

HELPLINE: 800.424.2494

RUTGERS HEALTH

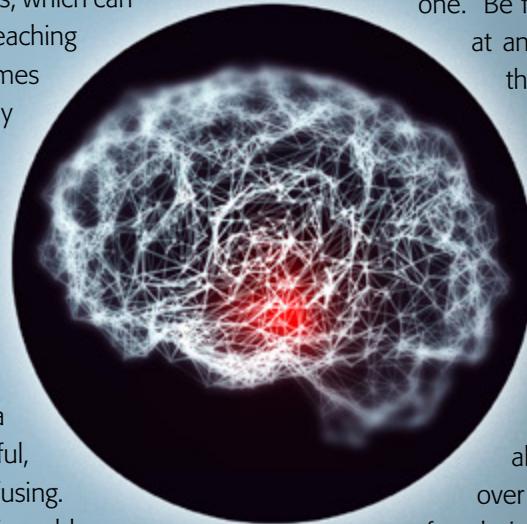
University Behavioral Health Care

COPSA Institute for Alzheimer's Disease & Related Disorders

Additional SIGNS of DECLINE

Behavioral Differences

Memory loss is a common symptom of any kind of dementia, but there are other behavioral changes that can indicate a loved one may need more assistance. When someone constantly repeats the same questions, swears that you never told them something that you know you have, or just shows a steady decline in reasoning, there may be cause for serious concern. Some people simply cannot be left alone, as they may forget that there is a pot burning on the stove, or they might get lost when they leave home. These are serious situations, which can lead to disasters with far-reaching consequences. Sometimes people with dementia may appear lucid, but when they are alone they may have hallucinations; seeing or hearing things that are not there. Delusions, such as thinking that a long-dead loved one is alive or that a spouse is being unfaithful, can be extremely confusing. Some individuals lose their problem solving abilities and make very poor judgments, such as giving money to a stranger, cutting the grass in extreme heat, or leaving the



house to go to work in the middle of the night. If gentle reassurance and reasoning do not work, enlist the help of a professional. Let their doctor know, or make an appointment with a neurologist or geriatric psychiatrist. These specialists can decide if there is something serious going on and, if need be, can prescribe medicines to help with more serious behavioral disturbances.

Things to Remember

When there are clear indications that something is wrong, be gentle about how it is approached. Remember to respect the feelings of your loved one. Be firm yet tactful, knowing that at any age, people take pride in their independence and do not want to be put down or told that they are ill. Focus on how much you care for them and want to help them have the best life possible. This will assure them that you are making the suggestions for all the right reasons. We all want to maintain control over our lives, and most of us fear being a burden to others. Be calm and reassuring. Try to honor their wishes for self-determination while still providing assistance to ensure their safety.

**SIGNS
THAT YOUR FAMILY
MEMBER MAY
NEED ASSISTANCE**

**Some things you
should look for ...**

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Signs of Decline

When an elderly person starts to show **signs of decline**, it may just be normal aging. But sometimes it may indicate **the beginnings of dementia**.



Whether you live with your loved one, or only visit on occasion, there are some things to look for which may indicate that help is needed. Everyone changes over the years. The more often you are in contact with someone, the less obvious these changes are. It is very important to investigate your loved one's living conditions, especially if they live alone or live far from you. Here are some things to look for, what they may mean, and what to do about them.

Look at their Home

Your aging parent may have been organized in the past, but the last time you visited there was mail left unopened, or you might see that bills are not being paid. Check the refrigerator and food cabinets; is there an abundance of uneaten or even expired food? Or is the fridge completely empty? If there is laundry piling up or just a general

cluttered environment, this may be a red flag. Unexplained dents in the car may indicate small auto mishaps where your loved one may be misjudging the road or his surroundings or be experiencing decreased reaction time. If you notice any of these things, it's time to step in. Look into your county's Meals on Wheels program, to ensure that a nutritious option is regularly delivered. There might be a need to check in more often, or even hire an aide to help cook, clean, or simply watch over your loved one. Day programs are also good options where your loved one will receive supervision, companionship and monitoring.

Their Personal Appearance

If your aging loved one is beginning to look disheveled, it may be a sign that they are having difficulty with the steps of personal hygiene. Some people may emit a strong body odor, which may indicate that they are not bathing properly or regularly. Unkempt hair or clothes that are ill-fitting, mismatched or stained can be warning signs that the person's perceptions are off. Older people sometimes have a fear of falling in the shower or develop an aversion to water, but this overall uncleanness may be a sign of serious impairment. Unexplained bruising may indicate falls that they are not reporting. Weight gain or loss may point to them having

difficulty getting adequate nutrition. Suggest a medical exam for your loved one to rule out any underlying health issues. Be present so you can see what is going on. If you can't visit more often to observe and help, find someone who can.

Social Isolation

People who have had strong social connections may sometimes start to isolate themselves. Maybe they used to go out with friends for lunch or sing in the choir but now they are staying home. This may be an indication they are having difficulty communicating or navigating social situations. This can be dangerous, as social interaction is essential for a person's mental well-being. If you find that your loved one is alone most of the time, find out about activities that will get them more connected with others. Senior transportation can be helpful if they are no longer driving. Senior centers are wonderful groups that provide interesting activities and special outings. Churches or local civic organizations are good places to find volunteers who can provide companionship and help with rides. Adult Day Programs provide valuable social stimulation for the person who has memory loss. Helping a loved one to be more socially connected also has the added benefit of helping them stay safe.

800.424.2494

ubhc.rutgers.edu/services/geriatric
www.Care2Caregivers.com