



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

What is Dementia?

Dementia is Changes in Memory, Thinking, and Communication That Affect Daily Life

Dementia means severe changes in memory, thinking, and communication. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia. But there are other types, too. In the past, people used the word "senile" instead of dementia.

The risk of dementia goes up with age, but it is not part of normal aging. We all have a little trouble with memory and thinking when we get older. But when those changes are bad enough to affect daily activities, they are not normal. They mean someone may have dementia.

A person may have dementia if they show two or more of the warning signs listed here.

10 Warning Signs of Dementia	
<i>Warning Signs</i>	<i>Examples</i>
1. Agitation	Being nervous and worried when there is no reason to be.
2. Behavior changes	Acting strangely. Doing things they normally wouldn't do.
3. Disorganization	Getting mixed up. Doing things in the wrong order.
4. Disorientation	Being confused about where they are, or getting lost.
5. Memory loss	Forgetting things. Asking the same question again and again.
6. Movement problems	Problems walking, picking things up, being uncoordinated.
7. Paranoia	Being afraid or suspicious when there is no reason to be.
8. Poor judgment	Deciding to do something that is risky or doesn't make sense.
9. Problems thinking	Forgetting how to count money.
10. Sexual actions	Doing or saying inappropriate things about sex.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

Get A Check Up

See your doctor if you or someone you care about has two or more of the warning signs. The doctor can check to see what is the cause, because it's not always dementia. Sometimes those signs can be caused by a problem that can be treated.

If it is dementia, and not something that can be fixed, finding out early is important. That's because Alzheimer's disease and other dementias get worse over time. Finding out early gives time to plan for the future.

Why Do People Get Dementia?

Many things can lead to dementia. Some can't be changed, but others can. By changing the ones you can, the chance of dementia goes down.

Things You Can Change	Things You Cannot Change
Blood pressure. High or low blood pressure may increase your risk of dementia.	Family history. If a close relative has had dementia, you are at higher risk. You can be tested to see if you are at high risk.
Heavy alcohol use. More than 2 drinks a day may increase your risk of dementia.	Age. As you age, the risk of dementia goes up, especially after age 65.
Diabetes. Having diabetes can increase risk of dementia. Controlling blood sugar can help.	Head injury. Serious head injuries, such as severe concussions, can increase the risk of dementia.
Obesity. Being overweight may increase your risk of dementia.	Down syndrome. People with Down syndrome are at higher risk of dementia.
Smoking. Smoking increases your risk of developing dementia. Don't smoke.	
High cholesterol. High cholesterol levels place you at increased risk for dementia.	
Low vitamin B12. Low level increase the risk of dementia. Your doctor can check this.	

Useful Websites

Alzheimer's Association: http://www.alz.org/national/documents/checklist_10signs.pdf

National Health Service of the UK: http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=106

National Institutes of Aging: <http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/forgetfulness>

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Alzheimer's disease and Related Dementia ~ Care Partner Information

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