

The warning signs of Alzheimer's disease

The Alzheimer's Association has developed a list of warning signs that include common symptoms of Alzheimer's disease (some also apply to other dementias). Individuals who exhibit several of these symptoms should see a physician for a complete examination.

- 1. Memory loss that affects job skills.** It's normal to occasionally forget an assignment, deadline or colleague's name, but frequent forgetfulness or inexplicable confusion at home or in the workplace may signal that something's wrong.
- 2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks.** Busy people get distracted from time to time. For example, you might leave something on the stove too long or not remember to serve part of a meal. People with Alzheimer's might prepare a meal and not only forget to serve it but also forget they made it.
- 3. Problems with language.** Everyone has trouble finding the right word sometimes, but a person with Alzheimer's disease may forget simple words or substitute inappropriate words, making his or her sentences difficult to understand.
- 4. Disorientation to time and place.** It's normal to momentarily forget the day of the week or what you need from the store. But people with Alzheimer's disease can become lost on their own street, not knowing where they are, how they got there or how to get back home.
- 5. Poor or decreased judgment.** Choosing not to bring a sweater or coat along on a chilly night is a common mistake. A person with Alzheimer's, however, may dress inappropriately in more noticeable ways, wearing a bathrobe to the store or several blouses on a hot day.
- 6. Problems with abstract thinking.** Balancing a checkbook can be challenging for many people, but, for someone with Alzheimer's, recognizing numbers or performing basic calculations may be impossible.
- 7. Misplacing things.** Everyone temporarily misplaces a wallet or keys from time to time. A person with Alzheimer's disease may put these and other items in inappropriate places — such as an iron in the freezer or a wristwatch in the sugar bowl — then not recall how they got there.
- 8. Changes in mood or behavior.** Everyone experiences a broad range of emotions — it's part of being human. People with Alzheimer's tend to exhibit more rapid mood swings for no apparent reason.
- 9. Changes in personality.** People's personalities may change somewhat as they age. But a person with Alzheimer's can change dramatically, either suddenly or over a period of time. Someone who is generally easygoing may become angry, suspicious or fearful.
- 10. Loss of initiative.** It's normal to tire of housework, business activities or social obligations, but most people retain or eventually regain their interest. A person with Alzheimer's disease may remain uninterested and uninvolved in many or all of his usual pursuits.