

Alzheimer's Warning Signs

A Guide for Families and Caregivers

Normal signs of aging:

- Forgetting names (but recognizing the name when reminded)
- Occasional difficulty finding specific words, but able to express the idea
- Forgetting the date by a day or two
- Forgetting to do something (but remembering when reminded)

Signs for further evaluation:

- Difficulty learning and remembering new information
- Loss of enthusiasm and slowness
- Word-finding difficulty, novel substitutions
- Easily confused, difficult to "unconfuse"
- Difficulty with finances, driving, cooking
- Multiple repetitions of the same question or statement
- Frequently losing things

Alzheimer's Signs

Cause for Concern Checklist

- ☐ Getting lost in familiar places
- ☐ Change in personality
- ☐ Isolation or depression
- ☐ Persistently confusing family members
- ☐ Forgetting the year and not accepting correction
- ☐ Denying or covering up memory difficulties
- ☐ Persistently unable to express an idea verbally

Benefits of Early Evaluation

Clarity & Direction: Helps resolve uncertainty and explains changes you're seeing.

Caregiver Preparation: Allows time to learn, plan, and create supportive routines.

Stabilized Environment: Encourages consistent schedules and safer home setups.

Life-Review & Care Planning: Opens space for conversations and future decisions.

Access to Treatment & Research: Provides opportunities for medical care and clinical trials.

Safe Reduction of Responsibilities: Offers a clear reason to adjust tasks that may no longer be safe.

Helps Prevent Risky Situations: Reduce accidents, medication mix-ups, money mismanagement, and social or workplace mistakes and embarrassment

Suggestions for getting a family member in for an assessment:

1. Talk with the doctor first. Express your concerns and give concrete examples of problems.
2. Gently determine if they realize there is a problem and if they would like help.
3. If the person becomes paranoid or accuses you of being the one with the problem, back off. Arguing will make matters worse.
4. Try getting the person to go in for another problem, like a flu shot.
5. Get the person to accompany you for "your" visit to the doctor.
6. If the person acknowledges a memory problem, but doesn't think a doctor can help, say there are new medications. Show an article; post it on the fridge.
7. Don't give them advanced notice of an upcoming appointment (which gives ample opportunity to refuse to go.) Simply say, "You've got an appointment today," "Let's go," or "The doctor called and said you need to come in."

Health care providers cannot tell you anything about your family member's health without that person's permission, unless you have a durable power of attorney. But they CAN listen to whatever information you want to volunteer.

What to expect for a neuropsychological dementia medical workup:

- Taking a history of the problems of the cognitive and functional difficulties
- Interview with the person and a family member
- A physical examination and blood tests to help rule out treatable conditions
- A mental examination and test of baseline intellectual abilities, learning abilities, emotional state, verbal fluency, novel problem solving, sensory-perceptual and motor abilities
- A scan of the brain (CT or MRI)

Unless your family member does not give permission, the doctor should be talking to a family member to:

1. Get information
2. Share results
3. Discuss any potential treatment options
4. Give information about Alzheimer's
5. Help you plan for the future
6. Put you in touch with community resources

If you are not getting this help from your physician, request it. If you still are not satisfied, find another doctor who will work with you to help manage the disease.

Getting a diagnosis does take time, but knowing what you are dealing with and the probable course of the disease helps the person and the family make plans for the future.