



Alzheimer's Disease – When to call the Doctor

Many people confuse Alzheimer's disease with dementia. What's the difference? Alzheimer's is a disease; dementia – which results in memory loss and disorientation -- is a symptom of the disease. However, dementia isn't always caused by Alzheimer's disease; it can be a result from other conditions as well.

Although some memory changes are normal as you get older, memory problems that interfere with daily life are not. According to experts, common early signs of Alzheimer's disease or other dementias include:

- **Short-term memory loss.** Although older memories might seem unaffected, people with dementia might forget recent experiences. Anyone can forget details from a recent event or conversation. People with dementia might forget the entire thing.
- **Repetition.** People with dementia may repeat stories, sometimes word for word. They may keep asking the same questions, no matter how many times they're answered.
- **Language problems.** We all struggle to remember a word occasionally. People with dementia can have profound problems remembering even basic words. Their way of speaking may become contorted and hard to follow.
- **Personality changes.** People with dementia may have sudden mood swings. They might become emotional – upset or angry – for no particular reason. They might become withdrawn or stop doing things they usually enjoy. They could become uncharacteristically suspicious of family members -- or trusting of telemarketers.
- **Disorientation and confusion.** People with dementia may get lost in places they know very well, like their own neighborhoods. They may have trouble completing basic and familiar tasks, like cooking dinner or shaving.
- **Lack of hygiene.** Sometimes this is the most obvious sign of Alzheimer's disease. People who have dressed smartly every day of their lives might start wearing stained clothing or stop bathing.
- **Odd behavior.** We all misplace things from time to time. People with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are prone to placing objects in odd and wholly inappropriate places. They might put a toothbrush in the fridge or milk in the cabinet under the sink.

If your loved one is exhibiting any of these Alzheimer's warning signs, do not panic. Having these symptoms does not mean that your loved one necessarily has Alzheimer's disease. But you need to schedule an appointment with the doctor for an evaluation.

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