

GUIDE · 6 MIN READ

Early signs of dementia in an aging parent

If you've found yourself googling this at 11pm, you're already doing the right thing. Here's what doctors look for — and what to do this week.

01. Forgetting recent conversations, not just names

Forgetting a name is normal. Forgetting you had the conversation an hour ago — and asking again as if it's new — is not.

02. Repeating the same question within minutes

Short-term memory loss is one of the earliest and most reliable signs. Different from 'where did I put my keys'.

03. Word-finding pauses

Substituting 'the thing you sit on' for 'chair', or trailing off mid-sentence. Everyone does it occasionally; with dementia it becomes daily.

04. Getting lost on familiar routes

Driving home the long way, missing the turn for the store, or coming back from a short errand hours late.

05. Withdrawing from hobbies, church, the senior center

Stopping bridge night, the weekly call, services. Often dismissed as 'just slowing down'. It's a red flag.

06. Money confusion

Unopened bills, double-paid bills, falling for phone or mail scams. Older adults are heavily targeted; this is often the first thing family notice.

07. Mood and personality changes

A gentle person becoming snappy. A confident person becoming anxious. Sudden suspicion of neighbors or family.

08. Trouble with familiar tasks

Struggling to follow a recipe they've cooked for 40 years, or to use the washing machine. The skill is intact; the sequencing isn't.

What to do this week

1. Start writing down examples with dates — three or four is enough to take to the primary care physician (PCP).
2. Book a Medicare Annual Wellness Visit (free for anyone on Medicare). The cognitive assessment is part of it — by law.
3. Rule out the reversible causes first: a urinary tract infection, vitamin B12 deficiency, thyroid problems and depression all mimic dementia.
4. If memory issues are confirmed, ask for a referral to a neurologist or a memory clinic.
5. Call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 helpline at 800.272.3900 — free, confidential, and they will not push anything on you.

Turn 'I think something's wrong' into a clear picture

The Care Companion logs the small changes day by day and prints a one-page summary for your parent's PCP or neurologist. 7-day free trial.

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General guidance for family caregivers. Not a substitute for medical advice. For urgent concerns, call your doctor or 911.

Free guide from The Care Companion — practical tools for families caring for someone with dementia. More guides at thecarecompanion.com/guides