

GUIDE · 7 MIN READ

12 signs an elderly parent can't live alone safely

Most families don't move because of one big event. They move because a dozen small things stack up. Here's what to watch for — and what to do before the crisis call.

01. Unexplained bruises or small injuries

Bumps on the shins, a graze on the forearm, a bruise on the hip — often dismissed as 'just being clumsy'. They're usually unreported falls. One fall doubles the risk of the next.

02. Weight loss or a much emptier fridge

Forgetting meals, struggling to cook, or losing interest in food. Look in the fridge and bin — out-of-date food, the same shopping bag untouched, or living mainly on biscuits and tea.

03. Same clothes for days, or stains on familiar outfits

Washing, dressing, and grooming are usually the first daily tasks to slip. It's rarely vanity — it's the effort of stairs to the bathroom, or fear of falling getting in and out of the shower.

04. Unopened post, missed bills, scam letters on the table

Financial confusion is an early dementia sign and a major safety risk. Older adults are heavily targeted by phone and post scams; even competent parents lose tens of thousands quickly.

05. Burn marks on pans, scorch marks on the hob

Forgetting the hob is on is one of the most dangerous warning signs. A smoke alarm test and a quiet word with the fire service (free home safety visit in the UK) is the next step.

06. The house smells different

Stale, musty, or of urine. Often the first thing visiting family notices and the hardest to raise. It usually points to continence issues, mobility problems, or a struggle with cleaning.

07. Medication errors

Pills missed, doubled up, or found in odd places. A weekly pill organiser or pharmacy blister pack solves most cases — but persistent errors need a GP medication review.

08. Withdrawing from friends, hobbies, or church

Social withdrawal is a red flag for depression, hearing loss, and early dementia. It also accelerates decline on its own — loneliness has roughly the same mortality impact as smoking.

09. Repeating questions or stories within minutes

Different from normal age-related forgetfulness. If they can't retain what you said five minutes ago, ask the GP for a memory assessment — early diagnosis opens doors to treatment and planning.

10. Getting lost on familiar routes

Driving home the long way, missing the turn for the shop, or coming back from the corner shop hours late. Driving safety needs an honest conversation — and possibly a DVLA notification.

11. Aggression, paranoia, or personality changes

Sudden suspicion ('the neighbours are stealing from me'), unusual anger, or someone gentle becoming sharp. Can be UTI, medication side effect, or dementia — always worth a same-week GP appointment.

12. You're getting more 3am phone calls

Confusion at night, anxiety, or repeated calls about small worries. Often the family's first real signal that the wheels are coming off — and the moment to act, not wait.

What to do next

1. Book a GP appointment — ask specifically for a falls check, medication review, and memory assessment if needed.
2. Phone the local council and request a free Care Needs Assessment.
3. Apply for Attendance Allowance — it's not means-tested and usually granted within 8 weeks.
4. Set up Lasting Power of Attorney while they still have capacity to sign.
5. Look at [care home options](#) early — not because they need one now, but so you know what's out there.

Track the signs in one place

The Care Companion's red-flag tracker, daily observations, and doctor-prep summary turn 'I think mum's struggling' into a clear picture you can show the GP. 7-day free trial, £3.99/month after.

[Start free trial](#)

General guidance for UK family carers. For urgent concerns about a loved one's safety, contact their GP or call NHS 111. In an emergency, call 999.

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