

Ten Signs of Alzheimer's

By Kate McCarthy

Early detection matters

We all occasionally forget names or appointments, only to remember them later. Typical forgetfulness is not to be confused with the early stages of Alzheimer's. Alzheimer's is a disease of the brain which causes a decline in recall, thinking and reasoning abilities. Since early diagnosis is so important in the treatment, it is necessary to be aware of the signs and symptoms that your loved one may be exhibiting. Once diagnosed, a person with Alzheimer's has better opportunities for treatment and may be able to slow the progression of the disease through medication and cognitive exercises.



*Early diagnosis of Alzheimer's is important.
Recognize the ten signs and symptoms of the disease.*

1) Memory loss that disrupts daily life

One common sign in the early stages of Alzheimer's is the forgetting of recently learned information. Also forgetting important events or dates could be a sign. When a loved one requests the same information repeatedly or becomes dependant on memory aids, family or friends to keep track of their information for them, it may be time to consult a physician.

2) Problem solving challenges

Alzheimer's will affect the way a person can solve problems or plan for the future. Often trouble will manifest when working with numbers or trying to develop a plan of action. For example, following a favorite recipe or keeping on top of household bills often prove to be difficult for those with Alzheimer's. Also common tasks take far longer and require far more concentration than before.

3) Difficulty completing familiar tasks

Those with early stages of Alzheimer's often find completing routine tasks increasingly difficult. They may have trouble remembering how to get to familiar places or

managing their checking account balance. Troubles with using familiar items such as a TV remote control or the microwave indicate that it is time to consult a doctor.

4) Confusion about time and places

We all can lose track of time or occasionally get confused about the date, but with Alzheimer's time loss is far more severe. People with early stages of Alzheimer's can lose track of the dates, seasons and even the passage of years. They can lose track of where they are and how they came to be there. Their concept of time is confused and they may not be able to follow events unless they are happening in the immediate present.

5) Difficulty with vision and spatial relationships

Problems with vision can be a sign of the onset of Alzheimer's. Early stages of the disease may manifest itself with troubles reading, judging distances or understanding colors. People with Alzheimer's have trouble with perceptions of people and at times won't even recognize themselves in a mirror.

6) Troubles with finding words

Those with early stages of Alzheimer's often have difficulties following conversations. They struggle to find words, often repeating themselves, and may stop in mid-sentence to search for the concept they were speaking about. They may struggle with vocabulary and use the wrong names for common items.

7) Misplace items

It is typical for all of us to occasionally misplace things. Most people are able to retrace their steps and locate the missing item. Those struggling with Alzheimer's have trouble with this process. They lack the ability to remember where things were or when they last saw them. In frustration they may accuse others of stealing. Often this problem occurs more frequently as the disease progresses.

8) Increase of poor judgment

Changes in a person's ability to make decisions or judgments are another common sign of Alzheimer's. Poor judgment when dealing with personal finances or trusting disreputable characters is common in the early stages of the disease. Often less attention is given to personal grooming and hygiene as perceptions and judgments are affected by the disease.

9) Social withdrawal

Those with Alzheimer's may stop showing interest in their hobbies, interests and social contacts. They may have trouble following their favorite sport team or remembering how to work on familiar projects. Those in early stages of Alzheimer's will purposely avoid social interaction out of fear that their cognitive changes are noticeable to friends and family.

10) Mood and personality changes

All people get used to a certain way of doing things and can get irritable when forced to change. Those with Alzheimer's experience mood and personality changes that go beyond occasional grumpiness. The confusion experienced with this disease causes depression, anxiety as well as bouts of suspicion and fear. With a constant feeling of something being wrong, but not able to identify what it is or why, those with Alzheimer's can react completely out of character when anything happens out of their comfort zone.

If your loved one shows any of these warning signs, it is time to consult a physician. With Alzheimer's it is very important to get an early diagnosis because the best opportunities for treatment take place during the beginning stages of the disease.

Sources:

"10 Early signs and Symptoms of Alzheimer's" from www.alz.org. Retrieved on 2/15/13.

"Early Warning Signs: When to Call the doctor About Alzheimer's" from www.webmd.com. Retrieved on 2/15/13.



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