



For life's most important **Senior Care** decisions

## *Alzheimer's and Dementia*

### **Early Signs and Symptoms**

Below are some of the early symptoms and signs of possible Alzheimer's or dementia. Keep in mind that some symptoms can be the result of the normal effects of aging or factors such as stress or depression. If you or a loved one experience any of these symptoms it is important to consult with your physician and get a proper diagnosis. As Alzheimer's and dementia affect the brain and its functioning both behavioral and cognitive changes are apparent early in the course of these diseases. Below are lists of the most common behavioral and cognitive changes.

#### **COGNITIVE CHANGES**

Difficulty or issues in any of the following cognitive areas should be brought to your physician's attention immediately.

##### Memory

The most common symptom in Alzheimer's and dementia is memory loss. While forgetting names or appointments occasionally is normal, a person in the early stages of Alzheimer's or dementia will usually be unable to recall recently learned information. A person's forgetfulness also will occur with increasing frequency.

##### Familiar Tasks

Everyday tasks such as acts of basic hygiene (showering or teeth-brushing), meal preparation or placing a telephone call can seem unfamiliar to someone in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's or dementia. Sometimes all or most of the steps required to perform the action are recalled, but the order is jumbled.

##### Language

Although occasionally forgetting the correct word for an object is normal, a person in the early stages of Alzheimer's or dementia will forget simple words or use unusual terms. Both speech and writing can be affected and might be slightly puzzling or difficult to understand.

##### Orientation

Occasional bouts of forgetfulness are normal, but a person in the early stages of Alzheimer's or dementia will be unaware of their surroundings when in familiar places such as his or her neighborhood or even inside the home.

### Abstract Thinking

Complex mental tasks or ones that require several steps may become difficult if not impossible to perform. Usually the difficulty is apparent in tasks that require a person to input information from various sources and then combine or assess it. Depending on the individual this could be an activity such as balancing a checkbook to following a group discussion.

### Judgment

An inability to make a sound decision based on a given set of factors is another sign of possible Alzheimer's or dementia. A common example is a person dressing inappropriately for the weather.

### Placing Things

Another early warning sign is placing objects in inappropriate or nonsensical places, such as putting keys in the refrigerator.

## **BEHAVIORAL CHANGES**

Major shifts in personality, behavior and mood or energy levels can also be indicative of early stages of Alzheimer's and dementia.

### Personality

A noticeable shift in personality can also be an early sign of Alzheimer's or dementia. Sometimes personality changes are hard to pinpoint, but the person is "not themselves" and does not act in accordance with their normal patterns of behavior. In the early stage of Alzheimer's or dementia an individual can often understand that he or she has forgotten some important piece of information and the inability to recall it causes frustration.

### Behavior or Mood

Alzheimer's or dementia can cause severe and rapidly changing moods, resulting in an individual experiencing rage, sadness and complete calm within the course of a few minutes.

### Energy

Passivity, sleeping for prolonged periods of time or sitting for hours either watching TV or not speaking with anyone are other early warning signs. A lack of energy or passion for life can manifest in a lack of desire to participate in normal activities, especially ones previously enjoyed.

**Early detection of Alzheimer's and dementia is important in its treatment and disease course progression. If you or a loved one experienced any of the above symptoms, we urge you to contact your physician.**