

Home for the Holidays: When Should Families Worry About Forgetfulness?

(NAPSA)—The holiday season is a time when families gather to celebrate, reflect on memories of the past and create new plans for the future. These occasions also prompt us to notice any behavioral changes among family members. Since many families don't see each other regularly throughout the year, it's often around the holidays that we notice both physical and mental changes in loved ones.

Slight changes in memory may be normal as people age, but it is important to recognize and acknowledge these changes, as they could be early signs of Alzheimer's disease or dementia. That's why it is also important for people to understand the differences between normal memory loss sometimes associated with aging and the potential warning signs of Alzheimer's disease.

"Many people notice their elderly parents gradually becoming more forgetful, but what often happens is that they do not take the signs seriously or they are afraid or unsure of how to take action," said Stephen Aronson, M.D., clinical assistant professor, University of Michigan, and noted Alzheimer's expert. "The problem is made worse because people suffering from the onset of Alzheimer's can often be defensive, and will often deny that a potential problem exists," Dr. Aronson explained.

Approximately 4.5 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease and that number is expected to increase to approximately 14 million by 2050. The potential implication for many of us is that we may have to fill the role of caregiver in the near future;



therefore, it is critical to be able to identify some warning symptoms. If affected by Alzheimer's disease, your loved one may:

Have Difficulty Performing Familiar Tasks. Individuals with Alzheimer's disease may begin to forget how to perform simple, everyday tasks that he/she has performed for years.

Become More Forgetful. A very common sign of dementia is forgetting recently learned information. While this happens to everyone, those with Alzheimer's disease forget information more quickly and do not remember it later.

Have Problems With Language. A person with Alzheimer's disease often forgets simple words or substitutes unusual words in their place, making their speech difficult to interpret.

Begin Misplacing Things. While it is perfectly normal to temporarily misplace your car keys, someone with Alzheimer's disease may place things where they do not belong, such as putting a container of ice cream in the microwave, and hoarding or hiding objects in unusual places.

You should consult with a physician if you have concerns that your loved one may be experiencing behavior changes or memory loss. "There are treatments available that can significantly slow the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, and the earlier the diagnosis, the more effective these treatments can be," explains Dr. Aronson.

Approaching a physician about your concerns can be a difficult task, but being candid about what you've observed leads to better diagnosis and treatment.

To assist the physician in a proper diagnosis, be sure to bring a list of unusual behaviors or symptoms you've noticed, past and present medical problems and a list of all current medications that your loved one takes. Also be sure to ask questions about the testing and diagnosis process. For additional assistance, ask for a referral to a physician who specializes in Alzheimer's disease and related disorders or inquire about local Alzheimer's centers or support groups.

Caregivers who are concerned about Alzheimer's disease and its effects on their loved ones shouldn't be reluctant to ask for more information and support. Caring for someone with the illness can be stressful and confusing, but resources are available to help you cope.

One free support program for both caregivers and health care professionals is called Sharing-Care, sponsored by Janssen Pharmaceutica Products, L.P. For more information, visit www.SharingCare.com.