

Is this Normal Aging or Something More?

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Many people become concerned when they forget a name, misplace their keys, or need an occasional reminder. While some changes in memory and thinking are a normal part of aging, others may be warning signs of Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia. Knowing the difference can help individuals and families seek medical guidance when needed.

Here are 10 warning signs to watch for and examples of what is typically considered normal aging:

1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life

A common warning sign is forgetting recently learned information, important dates, or events, asking for the same information repeatedly, or relying heavily on reminders.

A typical age-related change is forgetting someone's name but remembering it later.

2. Challenges in planning or solving problems

Individuals may have difficulty following a familiar recipe, concentrating, or managing numbers and finances. *Normal aging may involve occasional mistakes when balancing a checkbook or preparing a meal.*

3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks

A person may struggle with routine activities such as driving to a familiar location, performing work responsibilities, or remembering the rules of a favorite game. *Typical aging may mean occasionally needing help with technology or an unfamiliar task.*

4. Confusion with time or place

People may lose track of dates, seasons, or the passage of time. They may forget where they are or how they got there. *A normal age-related change is occasionally forgetting the day of the week but remembering it later.*

5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships

Difficulty judging distance, reading, or distinguishing contrast and color may occur. *Normal changes are often related to vision conditions such as cataracts or glaucoma.*

6. New problems with speaking or writing

Someone may have trouble following conversations, frequently repeat themselves, or use incorrect words.

A typical age-related change is occasionally struggling to find the right word.

7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps

Items may be placed in unusual locations, and the person may be unable to recall where they were left. *Normal aging involves occasionally misplacing something but eventually finding it.*

8. Poor or decreased judgment

Changes may include poor financial decisions, giving away large amounts of money, or neglecting personal hygiene. *Typical aging may involve making an occasional poor decision.*

9. Withdrawal from work or social activities

A person may stop participating in hobbies, work projects, or social events because tasks become difficult or frustrating. *In contrast, most people occasionally feel tired and choose to skip activities.*

10. Changes in mood or personality

Individuals may become more anxious, fearful, suspicious, depressed, or easily upset.

Normal aging may include occasional irritability when things do not go as planned.

Experiencing one of these signs does not necessarily mean a person has dementia. However, if you notice several of these changes in yourself or a loved one, it is important to schedule a medical evaluation. Early detection can help identify the cause of symptoms, provide access to resources and support, and allow families to plan for the future. For more information about the 10 warning signs, visit the Alzheimer's Association website at www.alz.org.

Information for this article came from "Alzheimer's 101," Kansas State University Extension, MF3364. For more information, contact Tara Solomon-Smith, Family & Community Wellness Agent, at 620-244-3826 or tsolomon@ksu.edu.

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