



Seniors At Home  
Better Care Starts Here



# Dementia Signs & Symptoms Guide

Recognizing signs of dementia,  
getting a diagnosis, and making a plan  
for the future





# Signs of Dementia vs. Normal Aging

We all have moments of forgetfulness from time to time, and much of that is a completely normal part of aging. However, confusion or memory loss that begins to disrupt daily life can signify a more serious problem.

1 in 3 individuals over the age of 65 will be diagnosed with some form of dementia. The good news is that early intervention can make a big difference in quality of life for those affected, so knowing the first signs and symptoms of dementia is important for us all.

To help you distinguish symptoms of dementia from normal aging, below are five signs of memory loss to be aware of:

1

## Memory loss which interferes with daily functioning

**Normal aging:** Walking into a room and forgetting what you came in for.

**Sign of a problem:** Increasing or new evidence of clutter and disorganization. Difficulty managing routine mail, paying bills, and daily household tasks independently.

2

## Confusion with time or place

**Normal aging:** Continuing to write 2016 in January 2017.

**Sign of a problem:** Writing 1996 in 2017.

3

## Losing common items frequently

**Normal aging:** Leaving your debit card behind at a restaurant.

**Sign of a problem:** Being unable to recall where you went during the day to attempt to find the debit card.

4

## New difficulty solving problems

**Normal aging:** Forgetting whether the electricity bill was paid for the month.

**Sign of a problem:** Increased suspicion/paranoia leading to irrational choices. Finding that the bill was paid, not remembering having done so, and accusing others as cause for the error.

5

## Changes in personality

**Normal aging:** Opting to stay home, declining social invitations from time to time.

**Sign of a problem:** A previously social person withdrawing, declining invitations frequently; Fearing that others will notice changes in cognition, or an inability to recall names.

# Should We Get a Diagnosis?

Anyone who is experiencing symptoms of dementia should work to get an accurate diagnosis at the earliest signs of cognitive changes. A diagnosis of dementia is critically important in ensuring that you or your loved one receive appropriate medical treatment, because:

- 1 There are over 80 types of dementia. After ruling out temporary causes of memory loss such as an infection or vitamin deficiency, an accurate diagnosis is essential for understanding disease progression, and for knowing which medications to take and to avoid.
- 2 Medications to help with symptoms of dementia are most effective when they are started early in the disease process.
- 3 Most types of dementia progress slowly, so an early diagnosis means that an individual can make informed decisions about the future while they are able to.

## Common Myths about Getting a Diagnosis

Seeking out a specific diagnosis is recommended, but common misconceptions lead some individuals and families to avoid doing so. Below are popular myths along with the facts about how a diagnosis of dementia may impact an individual's independence, or the care and treatment they receive:

**MYTH: The Mini-Mental Status Exam (MMSE) is a good screening tool for diagnosing dementia.**

**FACT:** Most doctors will conduct the MMSE once concern about cognition is discussed, but this exam does not accurately capture common deficits among those with dementia. For example, an individual may answer questions about today's date correctly, but once they are home leave the stove on for hours. The MMSE is a valuable screening tool, but for an accurate diagnosis, follow up including lab work and referral to a neurologist is needed.

**MYTH: A diagnosis of dementia will prevent acceptance into an assisted living facility or other housing options.**

**FACT:** Dementia is progressive and should be openly discussed when considering living options so that an individual's needs are met appropriately. Hiding dementia only prevents an individual from getting necessary treatment and further delays or eliminates their ability to plan their own future.

**MYTH: At diagnosis, my rights will be stripped away and I will lose my driver's license.**

**FACT:** A DMV test might be necessary, and the important thing is that you and others are safe. If you are no longer able to drive, a social worker can help to connect you to community resources that enable independence. It is also important to remember that one in three people are affected by dementia, and you are not alone!

**MYTH: If I don't have my memory, I don't know what's happening and how I feel won't matter.**

**FACT:** Identity does not fade or disappear with the onset of dementia. Professionals in dementia care will ensure that your needs are anticipated, and will be able to create a care plan to support dignity, autonomy, and social engagement.

# What's the Plan?

If you or your loved one receive a diagnosis of dementia, it is essential to create a long term plan for the disease process in order to maintain control over aspects of your daily routine and eventual care needs.

Below are **five first steps** to take after a diagnosis of dementia:

1

## **Share your wishes**

An Advance Care Directive (or Durable Power of Attorney) is a document that outlines your wishes regarding the types of treatments you may want at the end of life, and allows you to name another person you trust to make decisions on your behalf if you can no longer voice them. Make sure your advance directive is in place and accurately reflects your wishes. Discuss your plan with family and friends, so that they can help you maximize your quality of life.

2

## **Put your medical plan in place**

Talk to your doctor about medication options and about the next steps in your care. Develop a plan for monitoring strengths and changes in cognitive abilities over time.

3

## **Focus on overall health**

The most recent research shows that maintaining a healthy diet, exercise, and plenty of social engagement can have a huge impact on the progression of dementia. As part of your dementia care plan, include a focus on physical and mental health and make any necessary changes to your routine.

4

## **Consider participating in clinical trials and other research opportunities**

Alzheimer's Disease is the most common form of dementia and is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. There are many opportunities to join the movement to find a cure, including contributing to important research by taking part in clinical trials.

5

## **Seek out care and support from dementia care professionals**

The more information and support you and your family have, the better, and seeking advice from professionals who specialize in dementia care is a great place to start.

Seniors At Home's Center for Dementia Care offers educational events in the community, creates personalized care plans for individuals with dementia, and provides practical and emotional support for families.



# Extra Support

## Who We Are

Seniors At Home is the leading provider of senior care in the Bay Area. We help older adults live independently and give peace of mind to their families. We are a nonsectarian division of Jewish Family and Children's Services, a trusted nonprofit institution that has been providing care throughout the Bay Area since 1850.

## How We Can Help

With the most comprehensive list of services — including dementia care, palliative care, fiduciary services, and spiritual care — Seniors At Home's expert staff partners with you to personalize care for you or your loved one's specific needs as they evolve over time. Whether you're planning for the future, dealing with a significant life transition, or just need a little support to get through the day, Seniors At Home is here for you.

## Center for Dementia Care

Seniors At Home's Center for Dementia Care helps people with dementia live safely and with dignity, and provides practical and emotional support to families and caregivers. Our dementia experts create specialized care plans for each individual client, and provide the tools that families and caregivers need to connect with and engage a person with memory loss.

All Seniors At Home caregivers are also given specialized training to assist to people with all stages of memory loss, so you can be certain that your loved one's caregivers are of the highest caliber and training.

**Seniors At Home serves older adults in San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties. To find out more about how we can help, visit [www.seniorsathome.org](http://www.seniorsathome.org) or call us today at 844-222-3212.**