



Knowing What to Look For

When you see a family member only on holidays and special occasions, it may be harder (or much easier) to detect potential problems. And if your parents are still living together, keep in mind that they may compensate for each other's weaknesses, making it easy to miss the changes during brief visits. In earlier stages, problems may not be present all the time. Some days or times of day may be better than others.

When it comes to mental deterioration — Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia — there are certain signals to look for:

- Problems with managing finances, talking, menu planning, food preparation, sleeping, managing medications
- An overall unkempt appearance and disregard for personal cleanliness
- Changes in appetite and food preferences (e.g., excessive interest in sweets)
- Faulty reasoning skills (e.g., they may believe they must enter sweepstakes, or contribute excessively to a cause)
- Stacks of mail and unpaid bills lying around
- Lack of interest in friends or activities
- Forgetfulness or loss of short-term memory
- Depression
- Alcohol abuse
- Wandering
- Incontinence

Experts suggest you seek help, but not jump to conclusions. If several of these things are happening with your family member, go with them to talk to their doctor. A medical evaluation may reveal that a medical condition or medications are causing the unusual behavior. Stress, depression, nutritional deficiencies, Parkinson's disease and other illnesses may also cause memory issues.

Resource: Loverde, Joy. *The Complete Eldercare Planner, Updated and Revised*, 2009, Random House.

