



the compassion to care, the leadership to conquer

COMMUNITY-BASED MEMORY SCREENING

- Alzheimer's Association Statement -

The Alzheimer's Association® advocates efforts that increase early detection and diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, a degenerative fatal disease that currently affects approximately 5.3 million Americans. Alzheimer's is a very complex disease and unfortunately today there is no quick and accurate test to determine whether a person has Alzheimer's disease. The Alzheimer's Association does not support community-based memory screening in general populations as a means to identify people who should be seen by a physician for a diagnostic evaluation. Memory screening when implemented in community settings generally refers to the application of a simple mental status test that gives a numerical score to indicate the presence or absence of cognitive impairment.

Often these brief mental tests result in "false positives" and "false negatives." "False positives" occur when a person fails or scores poorly on a test but does not have Alzheimer's disease or another dementia. This happens most often for ethnic minority group persons, persons for whom English is a second language or persons with low educational level. "False negatives" occur when a person scores "passes" or scores well on a test but actually does have Alzheimer's disease or another dementia. This happens most often for persons with a high educational level.

The Alzheimer's Association strongly believes any procedure that uses a score on a test to indicate presence or absence of cognitive impairment should only be used as one of a battery of tests by qualified medical professionals and not singly in nonmedical, community settings, especially if conducted by those without proper training. Accurate diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease requires a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation by a qualified physician that should include: a thorough review of a person's medical history, physical and neurological exams, laboratory tests, and imaging tests. Interviews with family members or close friends about changes in a person's cognitive functioning and behavior should also be considered whenever possible. A diagnostic evaluation based on all of these elements provides the best possible assurance that the resulting diagnosis will be accurate.

The Alzheimer's Association has developed a list of the 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's. If you've experienced any of these warning signs, it's important that you see a physician who is experienced in diagnosing and treating Alzheimer's.

Ten Warning Signs of Alzheimer's

1. **Memory changes that disrupt daily life.** One of the most common signs of Alzheimer's, especially in the early stages, is forgetting recently learned information. Others include forgetting important dates or events; asking for the same information over and over; relying on memory aides (e.g., reminder notes or electronic devices) or family members for things they used to handle on their own.

What's normal? Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.

2. **Challenges in planning or solving problems.** Some people may experience changes in their ability to develop and follow a plan or work with numbers. They may have trouble following a familiar recipe or keeping track of monthly bills. They may have difficulty concentrating and take much longer to do things than they did before.

What's normal? Making occasional errors when balancing a checkbook.

3. **Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure.** People with Alzheimer's often find it hard to complete daily tasks. Sometimes, people may have trouble driving to a familiar location, managing a budget at work or remembering the rules of a favorite game.

What's normal? Occasionally needing help to use the settings on a microwave or record a television show.

4. **Confusion with time or place.** People with Alzheimer's can lose track of dates, seasons and the passage of time. They may have trouble understanding something if it is not happening immediately. Sometimes they may forget where they are or how they got there.

What's normal? Getting confused about the day of the week but figuring it out later.

5. **Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.** For some people, having vision problems is a sign of Alzheimer's. They may have difficulty reading, judging distance and determining color or contrast. In terms of perception, they may pass a mirror and think someone else is in the room. They may not realize they are the person in the mirror.

What's normal? Vision changes related to cataracts.

6. **New problems with words in speaking or writing.** People with Alzheimer's may have trouble following or joining a conversation. They may stop in the middle of a conversation and have no idea how to continue or they may repeat themselves. They may struggle with vocabulary; have problems finding the right word or call things by the wrong name. (e.g., calling a "watch" a "hand-clock").

What's normal? Sometimes having trouble finding the right word.

7. **Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps.** A person with Alzheimer's disease may put things in unusual places. They may lose things and be unable to go back over their steps to find them again. Sometimes, they may accuse others of stealing. This may occur more frequently over time.

What's normal? Misplacing things from time to time, such as a pair of glasses or the remote control.

8. **Decreased or poor judgment.** People with Alzheimer's may experience changes in judgment or decision making. For example, they may use poor judgment when dealing with money, giving large amounts to telemarketers. They may pay less attention to grooming or keeping themselves clean.

What's normal? Making a bad decision once in a while.

9. **Withdrawal from work or social activities.** A person with Alzheimer's may start to remove themselves from hobbies, social activities, work projects or sports. They may have trouble keeping up with a favorite sports team or remembering how to complete a favorite hobby. They may also avoid being social because of the changes they have experienced.

What's normal? Sometimes feeling weary of work, family and social obligations.

10. **Changes in mood and personality.** The mood and personalities of people with Alzheimer's can change. They can become confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful or anxious. They may be easily upset at home, at work, with friends or in places where they are out of their comfort zone.

What's normal? Developing very specific ways of doing things and becoming irritable when a routine is disrupted.