

## Know the 10 Warning Signs, Part 2: 6–10

By Marcy Maler, MA, Care and Education Specialist

*Maybe it's something else?*

That is what might come to mind if an older person begins to lose his memory, repeat himself, see things that aren't there, or lose his way on routes he's traveled for decades. Maybe it's not dementia. Indeed, most age-related memory problems are not signs of dementia or Alzheimer's disease, but as evidence shows a slow down in the brain's processing speed, increasing the time it takes to retrieve information. As we age, our ability to divide our attention between more than one task or bits of information also declines, which can interfere with storing new memories.

Did you ever stride purposefully into a room, stand in one spot, and then wonder what you had intended to do there? Have you ever lost your house keys, or forgotten where you parked the car? Relax. Occasional memory slips are natural. As you get older, chances are you will sometimes forget a word, where you left your coffee cup, or the name of the neighbor you bumped into at the market.

These small memory lapses happen. They are a normal part of aging—just like creaky knees, wrinkled skin, or blurry vision. As people age, changes occur in all parts of the body, including the brain. As a result, some people may notice that it takes longer to learn new things, they don't remember information as well as they once did, or they lose things like their glasses. These usually are signs of mild forgetfulness. Almost everyone has these experiences on occasion, but if they frequently happen to you or someone you love, they may be early signs of a progressive dementia.



Scientists continue to unravel the complex brain changes involved in the onset and progression of dementia. It seems likely that damage to the brain starts a decade or more before memory loss and other cognitive problems appear. During this preclinical stage people seem to be symptom-free, nonetheless, toxic changes **are** taking place in the brain.

Damage occurring in a brain affected by progressive dementia begins to show itself in very early clinical signs and symptoms. For most people who have the late-onset variety of dementia, symptoms first appear during their mid-60s. By contrast, signs of early-onset may begin between a person's 30s and mid-60s. Nonetheless, dementia progresses in several stages: preclinical, mild (i.e., early-stage), moderate, and severe (i.e., late-stage).

The Alzheimer's Association has created a list of warning signs for Alzheimer's and other dementias to help identify cognitive problems early. The May 2019 issue of *Tips & Tools* addressed signs 1–5 and here we will look at signs 6–10.

*Continued on next page*

alzheimer's association®

California Central Coast Chapter

**Santa Barbara County**  
1528 Chapala St., #204  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
Tel: 805.892.4259

120 E. Jones St, #113  
Santa Maria, CA 93454  
Tel: 805.636.6432

**San Luis Obispo County**  
71 Zaca Ln Suite 110  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401  
Tel: 805.547.3830

**Ventura County**  
2580 E. Main St Suite 201  
Ventura, CA 93003  
Tel: 805.494.5200

24-Hour Helpline:  
**800.272.3900**

alz.org/CaCentral



## Tips & Tools

### Typical age-related change

1. Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later
2. Making occasional errors when balancing a checkbook
3. Occasionally needing help to use the settings on a microwave, or record a TV show
4. Confusion about the day of the week but figuring it out later
5. Vision changes related to cataracts (do not ignore this, schedule an appointment)
6. Sometimes having trouble finding the right word
7. Misplacing things and from time to time losing the ability to retrace steps
8. Making a bad decision once in a while
9. Sometimes feeling weary of work, family, and social obligations
10. Become irritated when a specific routine is disrupted

### 6. New problems with words in speaking or writing

People with Alzheimer's may have trouble following or participating in 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 difficulty in finding the right word, or call things by the wrong name (e.g., calling a watch a hand-clock).

#### **What is a typical age-related change?**

*Sometimes having trouble finding the right word.*

### 7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace one's steps

A person with Alzheimer's disease may put things in unusual places. They may lose things and be unable to remember their last use or the possible locations to look for them again. Sometimes, they may accuse others of stealing. This may occur more frequently over time.

#### **What is a typical age-related change?**

*Misplacing things from time to time and retracing steps to find them.*

### 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, sweepstakes, or scam artists, or simply making incorrect change when purchasing something at the store. They may pay less attention to grooming or bathing, or they may be unable to follow reason or abstract thought.

#### **What is a typical age-related change?**

*Making a bad decision once in a while but understanding how to correct it.*

### 9. Withdrawal from work or social activities

A person with Alzheimer's may begin

to lose interest in hobbies, social activities, reading, work projects, or sports. They may have trouble keeping up with a favorite sports team, or remembering how to complete a favorite project. They also may avoid social gatherings because of the changes they have experienced and their inability to follow a rapid conversation in a group setting.

#### **What is a typical age-related change?**

*Sometimes feeling weary of work or of 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 feel they are out of their comfort zone.

#### **What is a typical age-related change?**

*Developing very specific ways of doing things and becoming irritable when a routine is disrupted.*

If you notice any of the [10 warning signs](#) of Alzheimer's disease in yourself or someone you know, schedule an appointment with a doctor. An early diagnosis of dementia provides a range of benefits for the individuals who are diagnosed, as well as for their loved ones.

Normal Aging	Progressive Dementia
Making a bad decision once in a while	Making poor judgments and decisions a lot of the time
Missing a monthly payment	Problems taking care of monthly bills
Forgetting which day it is and remembering it later	Losing track of the date or time of year
Sometimes forgetting which word to use	Trouble having a conversation
Losing things from time to time	Misplacing things often and being unable to find them