

NOVEMBER 2020,

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS WITH AN AGING LOVED ONE?

EARLY WARNING SIGNS ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS
MAY BE NEEDED

QUAIL PARK AT SHANNON RANCH
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If you're lucky enough to be able to gather together with your family this holiday season, here are some signs you should look for which indicate an aging loved one may need extra help and support.

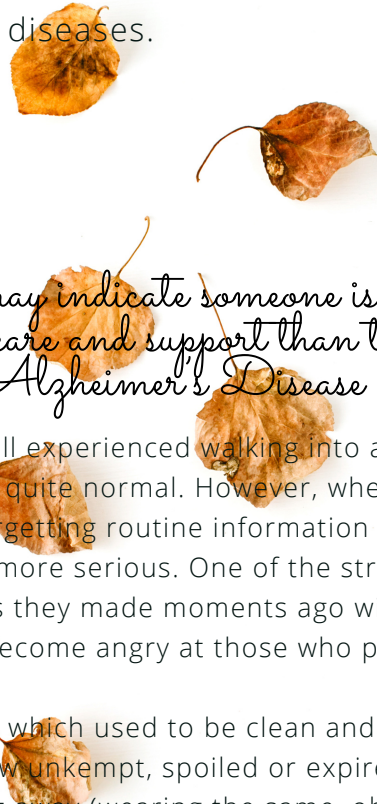
Grabbing – casually grabbing chairs, walls and counters as they walk around the house may indicate they are experiencing greater difficulty with balance. It is crucial to intervene early when poor balance becomes a risk factor for a loved one. Early intervention could prevent the tragic outcomes which often result from falls – fractured arms, legs and hips, or serious head injuries. According to the CDC, more than 90% of hip fractures among adults ages 65 and older are caused by falls – and about 1 out of 5 older adults with a hip fracture dies within a year of the injury.

Weight Loss & Empty Refrigerator/Pantry – in many cases, aging adults don't eat well balanced meals or only eating once or twice a day. Weight loss in aging adults may be a concern for several reasons – poor nutrition, low energy, depression, increased risk of fall-related fractures (loss of "padding").

Car Dents/Dings – for many aging adults, a vehicle may be a point of personal pride or the primary tool of an active social life. If you start to notice more dings and dents on their vehicle, it may be an indication that their vision is becoming a great issue – the most common of which, macular degeneration, results in the gradual and increasing loss of peripheral vision. A local physician who works with our senior living community, shared that he often notices dings and dents show up most frequently on the left side of vehicles. The loss of peripheral vision combined with the more complex spatial recognition required to turn left, often across traffic, results in more mistakes being made and thus more dings and dents.

Frequent Emergency Medical Visits – if your loved one has a chronic disease – congestive heart failure (CHF), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes – and is ending up in the Emergency Room or the Urgent Care clinic more often, they may be struggling to manage their disease safely on their own. You may find they are missing doses of necessary medications more frequently than they should, or eating foods which aggravate their condition(s).

Isolation – if your loved one is choosing not to participate in the activities which once brought them great pleasure – either by choice or by circumstance (hearing loss, vision loss, decreased mobility) – isolation and loneliness are just as dangerous to the health of aging adults as chronic diseases.



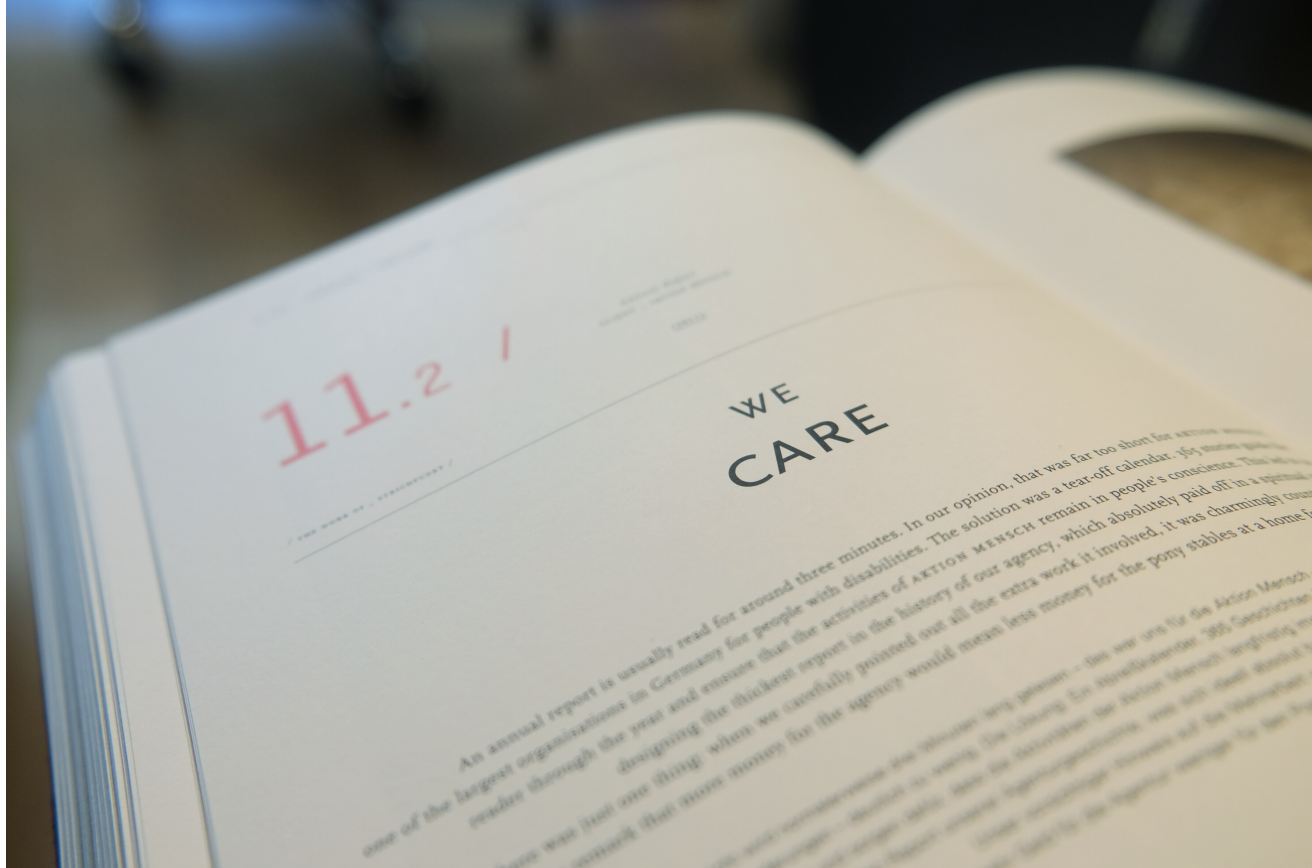
Signs which may indicate someone is dealing with memory loss requiring additional care and support than they are currently receiving (e.g., Alzheimer's Disease or dementia) include:

Increased Confusion – we've all experienced walking into a room and forgetting why we're there. This level of confusion is common and quite normal. However, when confusion and memory loss become more systemic – i.e., frequently forgetting routine information such as names, dates, and directions – you may be encountering something more serious. One of the strongest, telltale signals is when someone repeats statements and/or questions they made moments ago without any recognition they're repeating themselves. They may also become angry at those who point out these repetitions.

Household Disarray – a home which used to be clean and tidy but is now dirty and cluttered, a yard that was once cared for but is now unkempt, spoiled or expired foods in the refrigerator and pantry, or laundry not being washed and/or put away (wearing the same, obviously soiled clothes over and over again). These are often signals that cognitive processes are breaking down. People with normal cognitive functioning often take for granted how complex routine household tasks and chores actually are.

Financial Disarray – stacks of unpaid bills and/or late notices, unopened delivery boxes (items purchased from Amazon, telemarketers, or online shopping channels), checking accounts overdrawn (possibly succumbing to phone scams or requests for phone or online donations)

Medication Disarray – weekly pill planners with pills left in them, medications scattered on countertops, tables, even floors, prescriptions frequently running out, expired medications still being used – these are all warning signs that a loved one is unable to manage their medications independently. The most dangerous warning sign is an increase in hospital visits related to chronic health conditions for which medications have been prescribed (e.g., a diabetic no longer managing their insulin ending up at the emergency rooms due to spiking blood sugars)



Sundowning – this is an extremely common symptom for individuals in early to mid-stage dementia. Sundowning is a term used to describe the onset of multiple symptoms – confusion, anxiety, aggression, an inability to follow directions – in the late afternoon and evenings. If you notice your loved one becomes more irritable, frustrated, even angry in the late afternoon and/or evenings, this behavior may be an indication they have dementia.

These conversations with aging loved ones are often uncomfortable and may be emotionally charged. Responses may range on the mild end from deflection and denial to more confrontational responses on the extreme end – defensiveness, hostility and even anger. I often tell family members with whom I meet as they consider senior living or memory care options, “No one knows us like our family,” and they definitely know how to get us to back down or feel guilty if it’s a conversation they don’t want to have. If your parents or a loved one is struggling with any of these symptoms this holiday season, we strongly encourage you to start the discussion with those members of your family. These conversations can also be difficult for families to have, and may elicit powerful, complex emotions from siblings. Reach out to resources in your local community to help with these discussions. Consult your physician regarding physical and cognitive symptoms your loved one may be experiencing. Explore reputable assisted living or memory communities in your or your parents’ local community. In addition to offering solutions for aging adults and their families, they are experienced with having these difficult conversations.