



10 Signs It Might Be Time for Memory Care

Unlike many health conditions, which tend to develop or at least come to light all at once, dementia comes on gradually, and the signs can be confusing and easy to miss—or misunderstand. The dementia symptoms most people are familiar with, such as memory loss, confusion, and disorientation, are not the only signs that someone may be developing Alzheimer's or another type of dementia. Dementia symptoms can include delusions, agitation, sleeplessness, and extreme personality changes that can profoundly affect what your family member needs from a living situation. Whether your family member is living independently or is in assisted living or another type of senior living, you may begin to feel she has more specialized needs that aren't being met. This is the time to investigate whether your loved one could benefit from memory care, a specialized facility, unit, or program that's structured, licensed, and staffed to handle the increased demands of caring for patients with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. Here are the top 10 signs it's time to consider moving your loved one to a memory care unit.

1 Safety: You Worry About Him or Her All the Time

The number-one concern family members have about a loved one with Alzheimer's or dementia is their physical safety, caregiving experts say. People with Alzheimer's, dementia, and memory loss become confused, wander, and become agitated and even physically violent very easily. These problems can put them into all sorts of situations in which they endanger their health and safety. And these problems are in addition to any physical conditions they may have. When evaluating your loved one's safety, ask yourself how often each day you worry about her, check on her, or make a call regarding her safety or whereabouts. If your loved one has fallen, had a driving accident, or suffered an unexplained injury, these are additional red flags.

2 Caregiver Burnout: You or Other Family Members Are Exhausted

Caring for someone with dementia is mentally draining and physically exhausting. If a spouse or another family member is providing the bulk of care for your family member with Alzheimer's, the situation is not sustainable and is ultimately dangerous. Caregiver burnout is a very real problem—over time, the caregiver's physical and mental health will suffer and you'll have a dual problem to solve. Even when a loved one with Alzheimer's is still able to take care of her own physical needs, she may be emotionally volatile and extremely unpleasant at times. Dealing with irrational demands and being yelled at is stressful for family caregivers, while memory care professionals have the training and patience for handling these situations.

3 Health Care Needs: Memory Loss is Preventing Your Loved One From Taking Care of Their Health

One of the first things to go out the window when someone has memory loss is medication management. And failing to take prescribed medications on schedule—or taking too much—can lead to serious health problems. Dementia also affects your loved one's ability to prepare and eat a nutritious diet. You may notice food on the counter that should have been refrigerated, or your family member may skip meals altogether. Chronic conditions such as COPD and heart disease may worsen rapidly if Alzheimer's interferes with your family member's ability to manage treatment.

We don't have residents, we have extended family.

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4 Isolation: Dementia is Shrinking Your Loved One's World

Does this sound familiar? You can't take your mom out to eat, shop, or exercise because her behavior is so unpredictable. But at the same time, if she doesn't have ways to be active and work out her energy, she's even more likely to be disruptive. The result: She rarely goes out and is restless and lonely. Welcome to the dilemma that leads many families to consider memory care. Professional memory care staff are trained to use distraction, redirection, and other techniques to keep residents calm and safe. Memory care programs are equipped to provide activities and stimulation—including trips and outings—that can help your loved one burn some energy without you or others turning to medication to damp her down. Fear of driving also isolates those with dementia, and in a memory care facility your loved one will have supervised transportation when she needs it.

5 Unexplained Physical Changes: Your Loved One Looks Different

When you hug your family member, does she feel different? Weight changes, frailty, hunched posture, and moving with difficulty can all indicate that your loved one's ability to navigate the world is declining. She may be losing weight because she forgets to eat, or gaining weight because she forgets she's eaten and eats again. Hunched posture and moving slowly can be signs of being unsure—does she know where she's going?

6 Hygiene Problems: Dementia is Interfering with Personal Care

It's not easy to talk about body odor, but it can provide one of the strongest clues that your loved one is losing the ability to care for herself. Look for other changes in appearance as well, such as unwashed or wrinkled clothes, or even putting clothes on backwards or inside out. If your father, formerly clean-shaven, starts looking stubbly, he may be forgetting to shave or even how to shave. Likewise, if your formerly well-coiffed mother begins to look shaggy, she may be missing or forgetting to make her hair appointments.

7 Money Issues: Your Loved One is Neglecting Finances

Look around: Is mail piling up unopened? Worse, are you seeing creditor envelopes or collection notices? Losing track of financial matters is one of the first signs of dementia for many people. Look for unpaid bills, and check taxes and property taxes to make sure they've been paid. If possible, examine your parents' bank statements for signs of unusual activity.

8 Fraud: Your Loved One is Being Scammed

People with Alzheimer's and dementia are easy targets for hucksters, scammers, and unscrupulous salespeople. If you notice that your loved one is making strange purchases, giving to new charities, or investing in questionable financial products, these can all indicate the onset of memory loss and other dementia-related issues. Some charities will approach seniors over and over again, and if your loved one doesn't remember donating, she may contribute each time.

9 Living Conditions: Fire and Water Damage Can Mean Memory Loss

Whether your loved one lives independently or in senior living, check her physical environment for burn and scorch marks and other signs of damage that can provide important clues to her mental state. Memory loss makes it much more likely that someone will leave a burner on or drop a dishtowel on top of a pilot light and not notice the smoke. And if your loved one smokes, check blankets, mattresses, floors, and counters for scorch marks from dropped cigarette butts. Look for stains, mold, and other signs of water damage as well—your loved one may leave the water running until the bathtub overflows, for example. Even spills that haven't been wiped up suggest loss of attention. If a beloved garden or houseplants die because no one remembers to water them, that's a telltale sign as well.

10 Multiplying Items: Unnecessary Purchases or Hoarding

Is your loved one's coffee table covered with untouched magazines, her bathroom shelves stacked with bars of soap, her freezer full of unopened frozen meals? Repeatedly purchasing multiples of the same item is often an early sign that someone's mental faculties are declining. Your loved one might buy something, then not remember next time she's at the store and buy it again. An unwillingness to throw things away ("But I might need that in the future") can also be a sign that someone's grip on reality is fading. And, of course, if your loved one is showing signs of hoarding, that's an even more serious warning to seek a safer living situation.