



Signs your aging parent may need help

As we age, our physical and mental capabilities may begin to decline. This is a natural function of growing older. However, if your elderly loved one begins to exhibit behaviors or symptoms that are unusual for them or ceases to display typical habits, characteristics or routines, it's time to take notice and take action. Here are some things to look for in determining whether your aging parent(s) needs help:

Personal neglect

Have they slowed or stopped carrying out their everyday hygiene, dressing and grooming?

Mobility issues

Do they appear to have difficulty getting around or lack steadiness? Do they have trouble standing up from a seated position? Are there any bruises or scrapes that may indicate that they've fallen or bumped into furniture?

Memory impairment

Do they exhibit signs of memory loss at a level that is concerning? Do they seem uncertain or confused when performing once-familiar tasks? Are they missing important dates or getting lost in conversations?

Poor housekeeping

How does their home look? Are there piles of laundry lying around or spoiled food in the refrigerator? It's unhealthy to live in a household that's dirty and unsafe to live in a home that is cluttered.

Dramatic weight loss

Have they lost a noticeable amount of weight? Weight loss in the elderly is not uncommon. However, if it's dramatic, it might indicate a serious health issue, depression, a loss of ability to prepare meals, or worry about budgeting for food.

Social inactivity

Are they socially withdrawn? Isolation is terrible for both physical and mental health. As one ages, positive social engagement is still crucial. It just becomes more difficult to find.

Questionable judgment

Are they exhibiting poor judgment, such as excessive spending or making uncharacteristic purchases? Are they easily taken in by phone/mail/online scams?

Social miscues

Are they making uncharacteristic comments or responding inappropriately to friends, family or strangers? Do they seem to lack a "filter" in social situations that is unusual for them?

Money mishaps

Do they seem to have difficulty managing money and finances? Are there unpaid bills, late payment notices, bounced checks or calls from bill collectors?

Medication missteps

Are they taking medications properly? Check your parents' prescriptions to make sure they're being taken regularly and at the correct dosages.

Driving incidents

Are they safe driving? Are there unexplained dents and scratches on the car?

Chronic health issues

Are they struggling with frequent problems, such as urinary tract infections (UTI's), dizziness, "seeing things" that aren't there? Hallucinations and light-headedness are common symptoms of nutritional and/or electrolyte deficiencies, often due to dehydration. UTI's are a common result of dehydration.

If you notice any of these signs on a persistent basis, it may be time to talk with your parent and/or their healthcare advisor. A good benchmark is the presence of any one or more of these indicators at least half of the time you're with your parent. Pay attention to reports of these signs from others who spend time with your parent as well, such as friends or neighbors. If possible, stay in touch with these people for confidential updates, particularly if you're not able to be with your parent often.

Part II of this series, "How to Have Constructive Conversations," will help you find ways to discuss these troubling occurrences with your parents.

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