

## Forgetting is Not Necessarily a Sign of Dementia

“Last night I went to introduce my friend to my neighbor and forgot both of their names...do I have dementia?” This is a common concern voiced by people as they age. However, it is important to realize that forgetting for a short period of time, even a well known friend’s name, is not necessarily a sign of dementia. It can be a result of stress, lack of sleep, infection or even a medication interaction.

In this case, forgetting names or appointments occasionally is normal. However, one of the more common early signs of dementia is when a person begins to forget more often and is unable to recall the information later such as multiple appointments that they have made and missed.

“Now why did I come in here?” If you occasionally forget why you came into a room or what you came in for, that’s OK. It is when you find it hard to plan or complete everyday tasks or lose track of the steps in planning a meal or placing a telephone that you may want to consult with your physician.

If you have trouble at times finding the right word that you want to say that is normal, but people with dementia find that they not only often forget simple words, but they substitute unusual words making their speech or writing hard to understand. For example they may ask for “that thing for my mouth” or tell you they are “brushing with the oven” when trying to refer to a toothbrush.

All of us can make questionable decisions from time to time. However, another warning sign of dementia is when someone begins dressing inappropriately wearing several layers on a warm day or little clothing in the cold. In addition, someone with dementia may also show poor judgment, like giving away large sums of money or becoming involved in “too good to be true offers.”

Balancing a checkbook can be a challenge for many people, but a lifelong banker may find even the easiest of mathematical equations to be too difficult if dealing with dementia. When something that once came quite easily becomes too hard, it may be a sign of a more serious problem.

“Where are my keys?” We have all misplaced our keys or wallet at some point, but usually they are quickly found. A person with dementia may put things in unusual places such as an iron in the freezer or a wristwatch in the sugar bowl or they may put their keys in the usual place, but forget where that place is for an extended length of time.

With the holidays just finished it is OK to sometimes feel weary of work or social obligations. However, it is important to note that a person with dementia may become very passive, sitting in front of the TV for hours, sleeping more than usual or not wanting to do usual activities. These are also signs of depression, so it is a good idea to talk with a doctor.

Forgetting is something that everyone does from time to time; it is when it begins to affect your daily life or creates worries or concerns for ones safety that one must dig deeper. As previously mentioned it may be a medication interaction or stress induced. In the end if you are still concerned that you or a loved one may be suffering from some type of dementia, talking with your doctor or signing up for a memory clinic is recommended.

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