

10 warning signs of alzheimer's disease

It may be hard to know the difference between age-related changes and the first signs of Alzheimer's disease. Ask yourself: Is this something new? For example, if the person was never good at balancing a checkbook, struggling with this task is probably not a warning sign. But if their ability to balance a checkbook has changed a lot, it is something to share with a doctor.

Some people may recognize changes in themselves before anyone else notices. Other times, friends and family will be the first to observe changes in the person's memory, behavior or abilities.

To help, the Alzheimer's Association has created this list of warning signs for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Individuals may experience one or more of these in different degrees. If you notice any of them, please see a doctor.

Your memory often changes as you grow older. But memory loss that disrupts daily life is not a typical part of aging. It may be a symptom of dementia. Dementia is a slow decline in memory, thinking and reasoning skills. The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's (AHLZ-high-merz) disease, a fatal disorder that results in the loss of brain cells and function.

This list can help you recognize the warning signs of Alzheimer's:

1. Memory changes that disrupt daily life
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks
4. Confusion with time or place
5. Trouble understanding visual images/spatial relationships
6. New problems with words in speaking or writing
7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps
8. Decreased or poor judgment
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities
10. Changes in mood and personality

Signs of Alzheimer's/Dementia	Typical Age-Related Changes
Poor judgment and decision making	Making a bad decision once in a while
Inability to manage a budget	Missing a monthly payment
Losing track of the date or the season	Forgetting which day it is and remembering later
Difficulty having a conversation	Sometimes forgetting which word to use
Misplacing things and being unable to retrace steps to find them	Losing things from time to time

Alzheimer's Association Colorado Chapter

Providing education, counseling, support and a 24-hour Helpline to every county in Colorado
Seven offices: Colorado Springs, Denver, Durango, Fort Collins, Grand Junction, Greeley and Pueblo

Helpline 24 hours/7 days a week 800.272.3900
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Alzheimer's Disease: The 10 Warning Signs

1. Memory changes that disrupt daily life

One of the most common signs of Alzheimer's, especially in the early stages, is forgetting recently learned information. Others include forgetting important dates or events; asking for the same information over and over; relying on memory aides (e.g., reminder notes or electronic devices) or family members for things they used to handle on their own.

What are typical age-related changes?

Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.

2. Challenges in planning or solving problems

Some people may experience changes in their ability to develop and follow a plan or work with numbers. They may have trouble following a familiar recipe or keeping track of monthly bills. They may have difficulty concentrating and take much longer to do things than they did before.

What are typical age-related changes?

Making occasional errors when balancing a checkbook.

3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure

People with Alzheimer's often find it hard to complete daily tasks. Sometimes, people may have trouble driving to a familiar location, managing a budget at work or remembering the rules of a favorite game.

What are typical age-related changes?

Occasionally needing help to use the settings on a microwave or record a television show.

4. Confusion with time or place

People with Alzheimer's can lose track of dates, seasons and the passage of time. They may have trouble understanding something if it is not happening immediately. Sometimes they may forget where they are or how they got there.

What are typical age-related changes?

Getting confused about the day of the week but figuring it out later.

5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships

For some people, having vision problems is a sign of Alzheimer's. They may have difficulty reading, judging distance and determining color or contrast. In terms of perception, they may pass a mirror and think someone else is in the room. They may not realize they are the person in the mirror.

What are typical age-related changes?

Vision changes related to cataracts.

6. New problems with words in speaking or writing

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

What are typical age-related changes?

Sometimes having trouble finding the right word.

7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps

A person with Alzheimer's disease may put things in unusual places. They may lose things and be unable to go back over their steps to find them again. Sometimes, they may accuse others of stealing. This may occur more frequently over time.

What are typical age-related changes?

Misplacing things from time to time, such as a pair of glasses or the remote control.

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. They may pay less attention to grooming or keeping themselves clean.

What are typical age-related changes?

Making a bad decision once in a while.

9. Withdrawal from work or social activities

A person with Alzheimer's may start to remove themselves from hobbies, social activities, work projects or sports. They may have trouble keeping up with a favorite sports team or remembering how to complete a favorite hobby. They may also avoid being social because of the changes they have experienced.

What are typical age-related changes?

Sometimes feeling weary of work, 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 are out of their comfort zone.

What are typical age-related changes?

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

Note: Mood changes with age may also be a sign of some other condition. Consult a doctor if you observe any changes.