



Normal Aging vs. Dementia

Increasing forgetfulness, getting lost, and repeating yourself without awareness are all worrisome symptoms of dementia. The challenge comes when we try to understand what qualifies as a real symptom of brain failure and what is just normal aging.

The good news: Not all *senior moments* or memory lapse point to dementia. For example, failing to remember a name or misplacing the car keys are not symptoms of dementia unless they are occurring often enough to disturb your everyday activities. We all know our bodies are not going to last forever, so we naturally make adjustments to accommodate for these changes.

For example, many people need glasses or contacts as they move through their forties and fifties. This is normal aging. Although we don't like to admit it, our brains are also aging and we can't seem to respond as quickly or hang on to as many details as before, so we compensate by writing everything down. This too is normal aging and not a symptom of dementia.

More worrisome might be missing an appointment then denying it was ever scheduled, or becoming defensive when asked if we remembered to do something. You might also see trouble with short term memory even though the long term memory appears unimpaired. An inability to manage routine household responsibilities could indicate the need for further evaluation by a physician.

Sometimes what looks like dementia can be a vitamin deficiency, thyroid problem or even an infection that could resolve with treatment. If you are concerned, let your doctor know and get the appropriate testing done. You and your family should know exactly what's going on and how to prepare.