



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service
SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

Ten Early Signs of Alzheimer's and Dementia

Objectives:

1. Educate member on the early signs of Alzheimer's and Dementia.
2. Provide resources to get more information.

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

Over the past 6 years, I have watched my mom go through the signs of dementia and my mother-in-law deal the Alzheimer's. However, I did not know the early signs and wish I had known about them earlier so that I could have helped them cope with it better. From my personal experience and with the help of knowledgeable resources, I hope to share what I have learned.

Memory loss that disrupts your daily life are symptoms of Alzheimer's and dementia, however many are not recognized until the moderate stage. Alzheimer's is a brain disease that causes a slow decline in memory, thinking and reasoning skills. Below are 10 warning signs and symptoms. If you notice them in a family member, do not ignore them. Schedule an appointment with a doctor.

Lesson:

1. **Memory loss that disrupts daily life:** Forgetting recently learned information is one of the most common signs of Alzheimer's disease. Also forgetting important dates or events, asking the same questions over and over, and increasingly needing to rely on memory aids (note takes, recording devices). They may ask family members to manage things that they are no longer able to manage.
2. **Challenges in planning or solving problems:** Some people living with changes in their memory due to Alzheimer's or other dementia 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. Making occasional errors in managing finances is not a red flag.
3. **Difficulty completing familiar tasks:** People living with memory changes from Alzheimer's or other dementia often find it hard to complete daily tasks. Sometimes they may have trouble driving to a familiar location, organizing a grocery list, or remembering the rules of a favorite game.
4. **Confusion with time or place:** People living with Alzheimer's or other dementia 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.

5. **Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships:** Some people living with Alzheimer's or other dementia could experience vision changes. This may lead to difficulty with balance or trouble reading. They may also have problems judging distance and determining color or contrast, causing issues with driving.
6. **New problems with words in speaking or writing:** People living with Alzheimer's or other dementia 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 trouble naming a familiar object or use the wrong name (e.g., calling a "watch" a "hand-clock").
7. **Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps:** A person living with Alzheimer's or other dementia may put things in unusual places. They may lose things and be unable to go back over their steps to find them again. He or she may accuse others of stealing, especially as the disease progresses.
8. **Decreased and poor judgment:** Individuals living with Alzheimer's or other dementia may experience changes in judgment or decision-making. For example, they may use poor judgment when dealing with money or pay less attention to grooming or keeping themselves clean.
9. **Withdrawal from work or social activities:** A person living with Alzheimer's or other dementia may experience changes in the ability to hold or follow a conversation. As a result, they may withdraw from hobbies, social activities, or other engagements. They may have trouble keeping up with a favorite team or activity.
10. **Changes in mood and personality:** Individuals living with Alzheimer's or other dementia may experience mood and personality changes. They can become confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful, or anxious. They may be easily upset at home, with friends or when out of their comfort zone. People with dementia often become more sensitive to changes in the environment or routine; try to provide a consistent and predictable routine. Simplify the environment; reduce clutter and background noise. People with dementia may use your emotions as cues for their own.

Additional Resources & Suggested Materials:

- 10 Warning Signs Worksheet available at www.alz.org/media/Documents/alzheimers-dementia-10-warning-signs-worksheet.pdf
- 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's - free online course Available at: training.alz.org/products/4062/10-warning-signs-of-alzheimers?_gl=1*12s0xgi*_ga*Njc3NDMzMzE3LjE3MTg2MzYxMjc.*_ga_9JTEWVX24V*MTcxODYzOTg1Mi4yLjEuMTcxODY0MDQyNy42MC4wLjA.
- https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/10_signs

What is the difference between Alzheimer's and typical age-related changes?

Signs of Alzheimer's and 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 it 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

Lesson Summary: If you notice one or more signs in yourself or another person, it can be difficult to know what to do. It is natural to feel uncertain or nervous about discussing these changes with others. Voicing worries about your own health might make them seem more “real.” Or you may fear upsetting someone by sharing observations about changes in his or her abilities or behavior. However, these are significant health concerns that should be evaluated by a doctor, and it is important to take action to figure out what is going on with the patient.

Lesson Prepared by: Connie N. Lake, Extension Agent

Lesson Review by: Lindsey Brewer, Registered Nurse