

## SEVEN SIGNS YOUR PARENT MAY NEED HELP

### A Resource Guide



**Having concerns about a loved one's well-being, especially when they are older, is normal. Have you noticed changes? Is there something that feels off or unusual, perhaps atypical to your loved one's usual demeanor, behavior, or personality? Do they seem frail or vulnerable?**

Changes and adjustments are normal for all of us during our lifespan, but sometimes they warrant a closer look.

Striking the right balance between fostering independence, respecting autonomy, and ensuring safety can be a struggle for those of us who are part of an older adult's life.

Knowing when changes justify intervention can pose a challenge. But don't let your own discomfort or denial, or their dismissal of your concerns stand in the way of addressing them.

#### ARE ANY OF THESE SIGNS FAMILIAR?

**1 MAIL IS PILING UP OR IN COMPLETE DISARRAY.** Daily tasks are a challenge. Distinguishing mail that requires attention from junk mail is an issue. Managing finances may also be a challenge. Perhaps you've noticed this with other daily tasks as well, such as meal planning, housecleaning, laundry, bathing.

#### EXAMPLES:

- Your mother-in-law believes every piece of mail is a priority, but she becomes quickly overwhelmed and confused by how best to manage it.
- A deeper look reveals that finances are in disarray, which is completely out of character for your dad who was an accountant.
- Uncle Fred died and Aunt Carol doesn't know the first thing about managing household finances. Her accounts have been flagged at her bank out of concern as your cousin Chuck has been making large withdrawals from her account.

**2 EATING REGULAR MEALS, MEAL PLANNING, AND PREPARATION ARE PROBLEMATIC.** Planning, shopping for, and preparing meals requires problem solving skills. If your mom, who was once a magician in the kitchen with her culinary gifts, now struggles to follow a recipe, this can be a concern.

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**EXAMPLES:**

- You just had lunch and your mom asks, “When are we eating?”
- Last week you went grocery shopping for your dad. On a recent visit you noticed that the meals were untouched, yet he complained about having nothing to eat.
- It’s obvious that your friend Mary has lost considerable weight since you last saw her a month ago.
- The refrigerator is filled with moldy, rotten food. The kitchen cabinets are bare or filled with expired items.
- Aunt Lois, who was always a whiz in the kitchen, is struggling to interpret recipes. She’s mistaken salt for sugar more than once.

**3 HYGIENE CHANGES.** Your loved one wears soiled clothing, bathes infrequently, and does not attend to personal hygiene as they once did.

**EXAMPLES:**

- Your best friend Nancy always took pride in her appearance but, more and more, you notice her wearing the same outfit, day after day.
- There are noticeable stains on your dad’s clothing; this is out of character for your normally impeccably dressed dad.
- When you visit your parents, you notice as you hug them that there is an unpleasant odor, as if they’ve not showered or changed clothes in weeks.

**4 NOT ABLE TO DRIVE SAFELY.** The car has new scratches or dents, maintenance has been ignored, and your older loved one can’t explain why.

**EXAMPLES:**

- Your dad insists on picking you up from the airport on your recent visit. You don’t know if you’ll ever recover from the terrifying ride after he drove through red lights, crossed the center line, and appeared to have lost his way home.



- You listen in disbelief as your in-laws share a story of how dad’s memory isn’t good, but his eyesight is sharp, and mom’s eyesight is bad, but her memory is great, so she navigates while he drives.
- Mom calls you in a panic from her car. She is trying to get home following a trip to the grocery store, but a detour sent her off her regular route.

**5 CONCERNED FRIENDS OR NEIGHBORS HAVE CALLED YOU BECAUSE THEY’VE NOTICED WORRISOME CHANGES.**

They may step in to provide help if they can.

**EXAMPLES:**

- Dad locked himself out of house again when retrieving the mail and asked a neighbor for help.
- Mom left a pan of soup unattended on the stove, which set off the smoke detector, and sparked a kitchen fire that set off the smoke detector.
- Uncle Mike has a new “friend” that his closest friends are worried about.

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- House maintenance is a challenge. Your sister's lawn and yard are out of control, and she can't remember the last time she mowed it, nor does she care.

**6 MEDICATIONS ARE TAKEN INCORRECTLY.**

Your loved one is confused about their doctor's advice.

**EXAMPLES:**

- Your typically fastidious dad doesn't recall visiting the doctor's recently, nor does he remember that he has a prescription waiting for him at the pharmacy.
- There is an abundance of pill bottles all over your friend Sally's kitchen counter and a pile of pills in a dish.
- Your mom has been on a new medication, one of many prescriptions, and her memory had gotten noticeably worse.

**7 "MOM IS FINE," YOUR DAD SAYS.** Mom agrees, though your gut tells you otherwise. They have learned to compensate for one another.

**EXAMPLES:**

- Mom asks you the same question over and over again.
- Dad keeps telling the same story repeatedly.
- Your Aunt Rose, the family fashion plate, is wearing two different shoes, on the wrong feet, and a polka-dotted top with flower-patterned pants, when you come to pick her up for your evening at the theater.
- Bill is having difficulty tracking conversations or the plot of TV program you're watching.

**THESE SIGNS MAY SIGNAL YOUR PARENT NEEDS HELP**

These are common signs that something has changed and requires attention. If you have noticed changes in behavior, memory, general health, or



other issues that are uncharacteristic for your loved one, it may be time to address your concerns.

Matters of safety, housing, health, nutrition, quality of life, transportation, medical concerns, medication management, finances, and family dynamics can be complex.

Is your loved one reluctant to discuss these issues? Do you may find it difficult to broach the subject?

Every family is different, but there are supports and strategies available to help you focus on creating a plan to move forward, explore what matters most to your loved one, and help get them the help they need, while respecting their autonomy, independence, and dignity.

**HAVE A CONVERSATION**

Engage your loved one in a conversation about your concerns. If they are resistant to a discussion or reluctant to have a conversation, you may benefit from the guidance of an [Aging Life Care Professional \(aka Geriatric Care Manager\)](#).

We help families navigate these complex conversations every day. In addition, we know local resources, services, and supports that can be of benefit.

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If you live in the greater Seattle area, you can [schedule a FREE get-acquainted call](#) with one of our care managers for an opportunity for us to learn more about your situation and to determine together whether our services are a good fit for your needs.

There are Aging Life Care Professionals just like us across the country. To find an Aging Life Care Expert in your area, [visit the Aging Life Care Association](#).

## WHAT SHOULD YOUR NEXT STEPS BE?

- **DOCTOR APPOINTMENT.** It's likely time to schedule an appointment with your parent's primary care physician. This can provide a baseline and an assessment of overall health.
- **DISCUSSION.** Have you had an opportunity to discuss preferences and plans for long-term care with your older loved one/s? How do they feel about a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order? Do they have a Portable Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (**POLST**) form completed? Is their legal paperwork in order?
- **DOCUMENTS.** Assemble and organize critical information, such as financial, legal, and medical documents. Put them in a secure, yet easy to access place. If you need the support of an Elder Law Attorney, [you can find one here](#).
- **ADVOCATE.** Be prepared to serve as your parent's voice when they can no longer speak on their own behalf. Advocate for their preferences and in support of their plans. Serve as an additional set of eyes and ears.
- **BE AN EDUCATED CARE PARTNER.** Ask questions. Keep a notebook. Build your knowledge and skills. You'll find some wonderful resources and supports on the next page.
- **INVEST IN SELF-CARE.** Be kind to yourself. Engage others to help. This is a marathon, not a sprint. [CLICK HERE](#) for stress reducer & self-care tips.
- **CHERISH TIME TOGETHER.** Recognize that time is likely limited, and this is the time to make the most of what remains.



## RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS YOU MAY FIND HELPFUL

### WEBSITES

- **Aging Wisdom** — <https://agingwisdom.com>
- **Aging Wisdom University** — <https://agingwisdom.com/online-education/>
- **Aging Life Care Association** — <https://www.aginglifecare.org>
- **Better Health While Aging** — <https://betterhealthwhileaging.net>
- **Eldercare Locator** — <https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Index.aspx>
- **Family Caregiver Alliance** — <https://www.caregiver.org>

### BOOKS WE LOVE

*Dementia Reimagined: Building a Life of Joy and Dignity from Beginning to End* by Tia Powell, MD

*The Empowered Caregiver: Practical Advice and Emotional Support for Adult Children of Aging Parents* by Linda Fodrini-Johnson

*The Fragile Years: Proven Strategies for the Care of Aging Loved Ones* by Amy Cameron O'Rourke

*When Your Aging Parent Needs Help: A geriatrician's step-by-step guide to memory loss, resistance, safety worries, and more* by Leslie Kernisan, MD, MPH, and Paula Spencer Scott

