THE Courtyard at LOVES PARK
SENIOR LIVING

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF DEMENTIA: A FAMILY CHECKLIST

The Courtyard at Loves Park

Loves Park, Illinois

The signs of dementia can begin gradually, but early detection is key to making conversations easier and finding memory care for your loved one while they can still participate in the process.



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INDEPENDENT LIVING | ASSISTED LIVING | MEMORY CARE

Part 1: Warning Signs Checklist

Cognitive signs

- ☐ Memory loss that disrupts daily life, such as forgetting recently learned information
- ☐ Trouble planning, solving problems, or working with numbers
- ☐ Difficulty completing familiar tasks
- ☐ Confusion with time or place
- ☐ New trouble finding the right word or following a conversation
- ☐ Misplacing items and being unable to retrace steps

Emotional signs

- ☐ Becoming confused, suspicious, fearful, or anxious
- ☐ Signs of depression or a loss of interest in favorite activities
- ☐ Becoming easily upset, particularly outside a familiar setting
- ☐ Mood changes that seem unlike the person

Behavioral signs

- ☐ Withdrawing from hobbies, work, or social plans
- ☐ Poor judgment with money or personal grooming
- ☐ Wandering or getting lost in familiar places
- ☐ Repeating the same questions or tasks
- ☐ Changes in daily routines the person can no longer manage alone

Physical signs

- ☐ Trouble judging distance, depth, or colors
- ☐ Problems with balance or coordination, or more frequent falls
- ☐ Changes in sleep patterns
- ☐ Changes in appetite or weight
- ☐ Difficulty with fine motor tasks, such as buttoning clothes or using utensils
- ☐ Loss of bladder or bowel control

Notes:

No set number of checkmarks can diagnose dementia, but clusters could indicate the need for a physician's advice. Bring the list and your notes to your loved one's next visit to update your doctor on what you and other family members have observed.

Part 2: How to Tell Dementia From Normal Aging

Many of these symptoms can appear to be signs of dementia, but may only be normal signs of aging. This chart can help clarify the difference in some common situations.

Factor	Normal Sign of Aging	Potential Sign of Dementia
Memory	Forgetting a name or appointment, then remembering it later	Forgetting recently learned information and asking the same question repeatedly
Planning	Making an occasional error while managing bills	No longer being able to follow a familiar recipe or track monthly finances
Problem-solving	Needing help now and then, such as with a microwave or TV setting	Struggling to drive to a familiar place or complete a routine chore
Familiar tasks	Sometimes having trouble finding the right word	Stopping mid-conversation with no idea how to continue, or calling things by the wrong name
Conversations	Asking for an occasional clarification	Repeatedly asking the same question or misusing words
Time	Getting confused about the day of the week, then figuring it out	Losing track of dates and seasons more frequently, without realizing it
Place	Forgetting why they came into a room or forgetting where they parked	Forgetting how they got somewhere
Judgment	Making a poor decision once in a while	Frequent poor judgment with money or personal care
Mood	Becoming irritable when a routine is disrupted	Wrongfully accusing someone of stealing or becoming fearful without a cause

Notes:

This chart is not a diagnostic tool. Even a symptom in the dementia column could be a symptom of a treatable condition. Examples:

- Dehydration can cause confusion
- Urinary tract infections can cause agitation in the absence of pain
- Vitamin B12 deficiency can cause memory loss
- Depression can cause mood changes

Track what you notice, and ask a physician about possible alternative conditions that could cause your loved one's symptoms.

Part 3: Tips for Starting the Memory Care Conversation

Once Alzheimer's or another form of dementia has been diagnosed or strongly suspected, family members should make time to speak with their loved one.

Here are some tips for beginning the conversation more effectively:

- Choose a calm, private time when no one is rushed or tired
- Lead with love and observation rather than a diagnosis
- Use a gentle opener like "I've noticed you've seemed tired lately, and I want to help"
- Listen more than you talk, and expect some fear or defensiveness
- Focus on one or two specific concerns rather than a long list
- Involve your loved one in decisions, so they keep a feeling of control and dignity
- Start early to encourage multiple conversations over time
- Tour memory care communities together to keep them involved
- Ask spouses, friends, doctors, religious leaders, or other family members for help

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Part 4: Local Support for Family Caregivers

Diagnosing dementia and taking the next steps toward memory care is never easy, but you do not have to do it alone. These organizations in the Loves Park and Rockford area can offer guidance and support for seniors and their families:

Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline

This helpline provides free, confidential help anytime, day or night, at **800-272-3900**. The Illinois Chapter also offers local support groups and caregiver education online at alz.org/illinois.

Northwestern Illinois Area Agency on Aging

This agency offers information, caregiver training, support groups, and respite for families in Winnebago County and the surrounding area. Call **(815) 226-4901** or visit nwilaaa.org.

Lifescape Community Services

The largest agency serving older adults and caregivers in northwestern Illinois offers care coordination, an adult day program, and caregiver support. Call **(815) 963-1609** or visit lifescapeservices.org.

About The Courtyard at Loves Park

The Courtyard at Loves Park offers independent living, assisted living, and memory care in Loves Park, Illinois. Our memory care community provides a secure setting and a team trained to support residents living with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, with care that adapts as needs change over time.

This article should not replace medical advice. Talk with your doctor regarding any issues you may experience, especially if you suspect memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer's.