



Mental Health

COULD IT BE ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE?

Memory loss is probably the single most troubling issue for adult children when they haven't seen their parents in a while, especially those who fly in from out of town and see a huge decline. The first issue that comes to mind is that mom or dad can't live alone anymore. That may or maynot be the case. To help find out, physicians skilled in dementia screening can do a 10 minute assessment to determine if the decline is memory-related or possibly due to undiagnosed type 2 diabetes, medication conflictions, nutritional deficiencies among other possibilities.

A "mini mental state exam" which consists of a series of questions and commands such as: "Spell this word backwards." "Take this piece of paper, fold it in half and drop it on the floor." And judgment questions like, "What would you do if there were a fire in your house?" "I'd leave," is a really good answer, but sometimes they don't say that.

It is important to look at the whole picture to figure out exactly what is going on. Have they had a physical recently? Could they have depression, or a medical issue with a fixable cause? How well organized do they seem? How well aware are they of the last time you spoke and what was discussed? Do they seem to have it together or are they overwhelmed? The clues can be subtle and should focus on three key areas: judgment (will Mom

know what to do if there's an intruder in the house?), nutrition, (is there healthful food in the kitchen?), and mobility, (can they safely get around?)

If a medical condition is the cause, try to reassess after the acute condition is taken care of. Let them recuperate and then reassess. Some seniors are able to stay in the home via a relatively simple intervention.

BELOW ARE THE 10 WARNING SIGNS OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE:

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 and 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.

If you or someone you know experience any of these warning signs, please see a doctor. For more information call 877-474-8259 or visit alz.org.