



Dementia Australia

Warning Signs of Dementia

Dementia causes progressive changes to the brain however; in the early stages of the disease these changes can be very subtle. Early warning signs of dementia vary between individuals but commonly, memory impairment is a hallmark feature of the disease.

Memory loss

Issues with memory such as forgetfulness are one of the first symptoms of most types of dementia, particularly Alzheimer's disease. At times, everyone can become forgetful however, memory difficulties in Alzheimer's disease are more consistent and include: misplacing items, failing to remember appointments, and/or repeating the same topic or question.

Other early warning signs of Alzheimer's disease include:

Difficulty performing familiar tasks

An early symptom of dementia is experiencing problems performing routine everyday tasks. Sequencing of steps may be out of order causing difficulties when making a cup of tea, brushing teeth or washing their hair. The steps may be out of order or the person with dementia may skip a step completely.

Problems with words

An early symptom of Alzheimer's disease is word finding difficulties. A person with dementia may frequently forget the names of objects referring

to certain objects as "things" or "that". They may also have difficulty putting sentences together and understanding complex instructions.

Confusion about time and place

Often, an early warning sign of Alzheimer's disease is when a person becomes disorientated in a familiar place. The person may suddenly not know where they are, not know how to drive home, or forget why they went to the shops. Frequently forgetting the time, date and day of the week can also be indicative of dementia.

Poor judgement

Poor judgement frequently occurs in individuals with dementia and this can present in the early stages of the disease. Poor or impaired judgement may present itself as; difficulty judging distances, not taking usual safety precautions (e.g. turning off the stove), wearing summer clothing on a cold day, and/or driving erratically or not following road rules.

Changes in personality and mood

A person with Alzheimer's disease can experience quite obvious personality changes and these can become apparent in the early stages of the disease. Personality changes include; increase in irritability, increased agitation, easily angered, more suspicious, and/or more self-centred and disinhibited. Changes may also include a loss of interest in hobbies and activities, as well as, social withdrawal.