

When an aging parent or loved begins to show signs of memory loss it is natural to be concerned. Cognitive health ranks as a top priority for older Americans, second only to physical independence, and any changes should be noted.

But 'Senior moments' happen to everyone, and according to Dr. Heidi White, a geriatrician at Duke University Medical Center, most often the only prescription necessary is patience. "The speed at which we process information is one aspect of brain function that normally slows with age. With a little time, the (forgotten) word or name can be retrieved."

Alzheimer's is rare, but there are warning signs that can help you distinguish between true symptoms of dementia and non-serious senior moments. The Alzheimer's Association publishes a widely accepted list of ten:

**Warning Sign #1 - Memory loss that disrupts from daily life**

Forgetting recently learned information or asking for the same information multiple times can be a sign of true Alzheimer's.

**Senior Moment:** Occasionally forgetting names or appointments.

**Warning Sign #2 - Challenges in planning or solving problems**

Trouble following familiar recipes, or difficulties staying on top of bills can be symptoms of a real problem.

**Senior Moment:** Making a couple errors while balancing a checkbook.

**Warning Sign #3 - Difficulty completing familiar tasks**

Getting lost driving to the grocery store or forgetting the rules of a favorite game can be warning signs.

**Senior Moment:** Problems programming the TiVo or VCR.

**Warning Sign #4 - Confusion with time or place**

Losing track of the seasons or the passage of time is an indication of a real problem.

**Senior Moment:** Forgetting what day of the week it is, but figuring it out.

**Warning Sign #5 - Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships**

Difficulty reading and judging distances can sometimes be signs of Alzheimer's. Passing by a mirror and thinking someone else is in the room, or looking in a mirror and not recognizing the person staring back are also indications of a real problem.

**Senior Moment:** Occasional vision difficulties that resolve themselves.

**Warning Sign #6 - New problems with words in speaking or writing**

Persons with dementia may stop mid-conversation and not know how to continue, or begin to repeat themselves in the same conversation.

**Senior Moment:** Struggling to find a word that's on the tip of your tongue.

**Warning Sign #7 - Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps**

Alzheimer's sufferers sometimes put things in unusual places or accuse people of stealing items that they can't locate.

**Senior Moment:** Misplacing a pair of reading glasses.

**Warning Sign #8 - Decreased or poor judgment**

Pledging significant sums to telemarketers, and paying no attention to personal grooming are both examples of poor judgment associated with dementia.

**Senior Moment:** Making an occasional rash decision with disposable income.

**Warning Sign #9 - Withdrawal from work or social activities**

People with Alzheimer's sometimes give up their hobbies or friends. Losing interest in favorite sports teams or television shows can also be a sign.

**Senior Moment:** Feeling weary of work or family obligations.