

Spotting the Early Signs of Cognitive Decline



Mild cognitive impairments and dementia are broad terms that describe a range of symptoms related to a decrease on one's mental ability, impacting everything from memory to behaviours. Although small amounts of mild cognitive impairments are common in aging and often do not interfere with everyday tasks, more severe impairments like dementia are not normal.

It is important to know the most common signs and symptoms which may indicate a problem. Mild cognitive impairments can begin in midlife, but symptoms commonly begin at 70 years of age or older. First symptoms of dementia typically appear in someone's mid-60s or later. Early recognition of these symptoms is key to ensuring that you or a loved one gets the appropriate support needed.

Symptoms of cognitive decline include:

- Getting lost in familiar spaces.
- Repetitive questioning.
- Odd or inappropriate behaviours.
- Forgetfulness of recent life events.
- Repeated falls and/or loss of balance.
- Personality changes.
- Decline in planning and organization.

If you notice any of these symptoms in yourself or a loved one, it is important to speak with your primary healthcare provider. Early intervention is important for understanding and managing mild cognitive impairment or dementia.

It can be overwhelming to go into a doctor's appointment and discuss these topics. Here are some suggestions to best approach the appointment:

1. Before seeing the doctor, make a list of symptoms you have observed. Be specific – note when you first saw changes in memory, behaviour, or mood and how often these symptoms occur.
2. Bring a support person to the appointment. A close friend or family member could offer additional insights or observations they have noticed. They can also offer you support before, during, and after the appointment.
3. Come to your appointment with questions! This will allow you to have a clear understanding of what might be happening and what you should do about it.

Cognitive decline, of all kinds, is complex and can impact every part of a person's life. Learning about symptoms and early recognition can help improve outcomes and treatment. If you are curious to learn more, speak with your primary healthcare provider to learn if you are eligible for screening tests in your region!



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