

Recognizing When it is Time for Help

Common areas where seniors start to struggle

- Physical health and mobility
- Mental health and cognitive abilities
- Medication management
- Nutrition
- Home safety and accessibility

Physical Health and Mobility

There are many signs associated with declining physical health and mobility such as:

- Obvious sign of illness
- Delirium and confusion
- Unexplained weight loss or gain
- Changes in sleep

If you notice these signs, it is important to seek medical attention:

Some signs of mobility suffering are:

- Difficulty getting in or out of bed
- Reduced walking tolerance
- Difficulty using stairs

Early intervention with physical or occupational therapy can help preserve function and strength.

Mental Health and Cognitive Abilities

Signs of depression and anxiety include:

- Apathy or lack of interest in engaging with others.
- Sadness that is persistent
- A loss of interest in eating or conversely eating too much or drinking too much alcohol
- Sleeping more than one would find normal may be a sign of depression
- Not taking care of one's hygiene

As we age, it is normal to experience cognitive changes but there is a difference between age-related memory changes and dementia. Some signs of dementia to be aware of are:

- Forgetting important information such as names, dates and events that are highly meaningful, on a regular basis
- Demonstrating a change in personality such as being more aggressive or even showing signs of unreasonable paranoia
- Seniors with cognitive concerns may demonstrate more confusion later in the day or evening
- If a senior is no longer taking an interest in their personal hygiene or how they are dressing

Medication Management

This is a significant risk for seniors as 70% of seniors take 5 or more medications. Medications taken at the wrong time or dose can have serious consequences.

Some symptoms of medication mismanagement include:

- Increase in un-steadiness or falls
- Dizzy or light-headed?
- Change in their cognitive state: confused, disoriented, over drowsy or have signs of delirium
- The symptoms for which a medication was prescribed are recurring or unusual side effects cropped up
- Pills on the floor or under furniture
- Prescriptions not lasting the anticipated length of time

Tips for Medication Management

- Read the information sheets that come with medications
- Share your medication schedule with your spouse, family, caregivers, and/or doctor
- Use only one pharmacy
- Use a dosette, which is a pill organizer to keep track of your pills
- Check the expiry on medication

Nutrition

There are many signs that a senior is not eating well.

- The fridge and cupboards are not well stocked
- Is the senior shrinking? Weight loss can be a sign of other medical issues, but its simplest cause is simply not eating enough calories
- Is the food in the fridge expired or rotting?

Some reasons why a senior may not eat well are:

- Difficulty getting to the grocery store
- Depression and loneliness can often manifest in losing one's appetite or desire to eat

Tips to Improve Nutrition

- Addressing safety in the kitchen to encourage cooking
- Have meals delivered to their home
- Groceries can be delivered to the home
- If an appetite is small, choosing nutritious food is critical
- Pop over and clear out your loved one's fridge every week or so
- Enlist the help of the family doctor and perhaps a nutritionist
- Finally, try to make eating more sociable. If possible, time your visits to coincide with mealtimes and share a meal together. Invite your loved one to eat with you and your family. If you cannot be there in person, set up a video call to enjoy a meal together virtually

Home Safety (see our January 2021 webinar for more information!)

Home safety is an important part of ensuring a senior's health. Some signs that home safety may be a concern are:

- Falls in the home
- Bruises or burns
- Burned pots and pans indicating they might be forgetting to turn off the stove.

Strategies to improve home safety

- Have an Occupational Therapist complete a home evaluation
- Installing a stair lift, ramps, grab bars, etc.
- Using automatic shut off devices