

# REAL LIFE SOLUTIONS

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## Aging parents: 7 Warning Signs of Health Problems

**C**oncerned about your aging parents' health? Use this guide to gauge how your aging parents are doing — and what to do if they need help.

### Are your aging parents...

**1. Taking care of themselves?** Pay attention to your parents' appearance. Failure to keep up with daily routines such as bathing, tooth brushing and other basic grooming could indicate dementia, depression or physical impairments.

Also pay attention to your parents' home. Any big changes around the house could provide clues to their health. Neglected housework could be a sign of depression, dementia or other concerns.

**2. Experiencing memory loss?** Modest memory problems are a fairly common part of aging, and sometimes medication side effects or underlying conditions contribute to memory loss. There's a difference, though, between normal changes in memory and the type of memory loss associated with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia. If you're concerned about memory loss for your aging parents, schedule an evaluation with the doctor.

**3. Safe in their home?** Take a look around your parents' home, keeping an eye out for any red flags.

**4. Safe on the road?** If your aging parents become confused while driving or you're concerned about their ability to drive safely, it might be time to stop driving. Help your aging parents maintain their independence, by suggesting alternate transportation options.

**5. Losing weight?** Losing weight without trying could be a sign that something's wrong. For aging parents, weight loss could be related to many factors, including:

- Difficulty cooking.
- Loss of taste or smell.
- Underlying conditions. Sometimes weight loss indicates a serious underlying condition, such as malnutrition, dementia, depression or cancer.

**6. In good spirits?** A drastically different mood or outlook could be a sign of depression or other health concerns. If you're concerned about your parents' moods, schedule an evaluation.

**7. Able to get around?** Pay attention to how your parents are walking. If your parents are unsteady on their feet, they might be at risk of falling — a major cause of disability among older adults.

### Taking action

- **Share your concerns with your parents.** Talk to your parents openly and honestly. Knowing that you're concerned about their health might give them the motivation they need to see a doctor or make other changes. Consider including other people who care about your parents in the conversation, such as other loved ones, close friends or clergy.
- **Encourage regular medical checkups.** If you're worried about a parent's weight loss, depressed mood, or other signs and symptoms, encourage your parent to schedule a doctor's visit. You might offer to schedule the visit yourself or to accompany your parent to the doctor.

- **Address safety issues.** Point out any potential safety issues to your parents then make a plan to address the problems.
- **Consider home care services.** If your aging parents are having trouble taking care of themselves, perhaps you could hire someone to clean the house and run errands. You might also consider Meals on Wheels or other community services.
- **Contact the doctor for guidance.** If your parents dismiss your concerns, consider contacting the doctor directly. Your insights can help the doctor understand what to look for during upcoming visits. Keep in mind that the doctor might need to verify that he or she has permission to speak with you about your parents' care, which might include a signed form or waiver from your parents.
- **Seek help from local agencies.** Your local agency on aging can connect you with services in your parents' area. For example, the county in which your parents live might have social workers who can evaluate your parents' needs and put them in touch with pertinent services, such as home care workers and help with meals and transportation.

Sometimes aging parents won't admit they need help around the house. Others don't realize they need help. Remind your parents that you care about them and that you want to do what's best to promote their health and wellbeing, both today and in the months and years to come.

*Reprinted from the MayoClinic.com article "Aging Parents: 7 warning signs of health problems" (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/aging-parents/HA00082>)*

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