

ELDER CARE UPDATES



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www.rochestereldercare.com

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Is it Normal Aging or Dementia?

by Karen Witkowicz

Your elderly father seems to be more forgetful lately. He needs more reminders about taking his medicines and sometimes gets the dates for his doctor's appointments mixed-up. You notice he misplaces his car keys and wallet more and needs your help to find them. He is an avid football fan, but lately is unable to remember his favorite players on the home team. You wonder, "Is this normal or is this something I need to talk to the doctor about?"

Dementia is an umbrella term for a group of illnesses that have symptoms in common. These are short-term memory loss, loss of judgment, confusion, disorientation, mood and behavior changes and loss of the ability to carry out daily living skills such as dressing and bathing.

In the beginning stages of dementia, the course of illness is usually very slow and insidious. People with some forgetfulness are able to compensate with notes, reminders and "to do" lists. People with dementia often look and sound as they always do. Many times they are very healthy overall. They may be able to use all of the social skills and graces that have been ingrained in them over the years. Friends, who have not seen the person in a long time, may talk briefly with him/her and not be aware of any dementia. Sometimes, it is difficult for caregivers to face the fact that something may be wrong. They may interpret the signs of behavior changes, memory loss and lack of judgment as normal aging.

Eventually, the problems become more obvious. A person who was an



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accountant all her life may not be able to balance her checkbook. A person who was an English teacher may be unable to recall the names of common objects. Someone who was always good with directions may get lost going to the grocery store a mile away. Everyone with dementia expresses signs and symptoms in different ways. However, there are common signs of beginning early stage dementia. They are:

- Short-term memory loss – If a person with dementia loses his keys, his memory of where they are is gone. He will not remember a little while later where they are or be able to retrace his steps. Parts of recent events may be forgotten permanently.
- Difficulty with language – The person cannot name common objects, may call objects by a different name, and cannot find the right word or phrase to complete a thought.

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*"Excellent care for your loved one
. Peace of mind for you."*

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Elder Care Updates

New Senior Community To Open in Greece

Legacy, a senior housing provider, is opening a new senior community in Greece. There will be independent senior apartments, assistive living apartments and more. The address is 3330 Mt. Read Blvd. For more information on this exciting Westside community, please call Ginny Bolton at 865-0680 or email www.rochesterindependentliving.com.

IS IT NORMAL AGING OR DEMENTIA?

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- **Mood Swings** – The person may become somewhat sad and depressed or anxious and frustrated about having difficulty completing tasks.
- **Poor judgment** – The person may make decisions that do not seem to fit the situation. He may order every magazine in the advertising he receives. He may not pay attention to personal safety, such as putting his wallet away after going to the bank or looking both ways when he crosses the street.
- **Difficulty in performing familiar routines** – The person may forget that he/she already ate breakfast that morning and eat again. Or, the person may think she has already taken her medicines and not have done so.
- **Disorientation** – The person may not remember what day it is or how to get back to the house if he/she takes a walk in her own neighborhood.
- **Inability to think abstractly or rationally** – The person may not remember how to manage money. The whole concept of numbers may not mean anything to them. The person does not understand the consequences of his actions.

If the caregiver suspects a dementia, the first thing to do is to consult the person's doctor about a possible diagnosis. Often, a memory care clinic or a neuropsychiatry clinic is a good place to go for a thorough medical assessment. There may be a medical condition that is reversible and can be treated. Adverse drug reactions, malnutrition, Vitamin B deficiency, thyroid problems, depression, infections can all produce symptoms that look like a dementing illness. After all other possible diagnoses are ruled-out, then a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or other dementia may be made.

The sooner the diagnosis is made; the sooner help can be offered to both the caregiver and person with the illness. There are many new drug therapies and drug studies going on in this community. There are education classes and support groups for both caregivers and people with dementia. The community stands ready to help. For more information about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, call the Alzheimer's Association, Rochester Chapter at 760-5400 or (800) 724-0587.

Resources For Caregivers

Local Resources:

For medical assessments of the elderly and assistance with helping families cope with medical changes, call:

Geriatric Evaluation Program at Monroe Community Hospital
760-6040

Geriatric Neurology & Psychiatry Clinic at Monroe Community Hospital
760-6221

Strong Memorial Hospital Older Adults Service
275-3571

Websites:

www.asaging.org

American Society on Aging's web site where you will find many educational resources, job bank, student section, section on conferences and training as well as other information to enhance the knowledge and skills of those working with older adults and their families.

www.aahsa.org

American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging has an extremely helpful website with information on housing and residential options, including nursing homes.

Books:

"Facing Alzheimer's: Family Caregivers Speak" by Patricia Brown Coughlan

This is a very practical, warmhearted book where 8 women who have lived through their husbands' decline, talk about the painful situations they faced and the decisions they made.