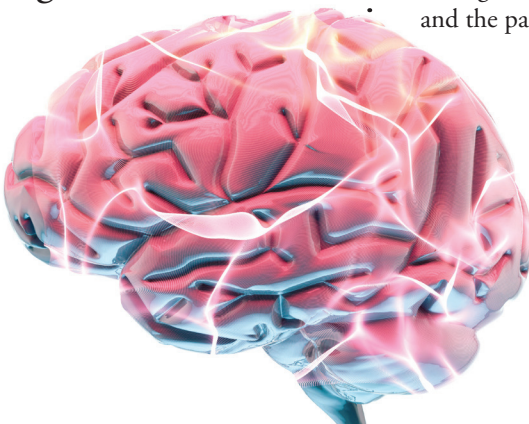




Warning signs of dementia

It's normal to become a bit more forgetful as you age. But how can you tell if occasional forgetfulness is normal aging or a cause for concern?

Dementia occurs when the brain experiences a cognitive decline that interferes with daily life. It's important to know the difference between normal forgetfulness and the early warning signs of dementia.



EARLY WARNING SIGNS

It's easy to want to dismiss the early signs of cognitive decline as normal aging. However, many people live long lives without significant cognitive decline. It's not normal for forgetfulness to interfere with daily life.

Early signs of dementia include:

- Getting lost in familiar areas
- Misplacing common items and struggling to find them
- Tripping, spilling, or dropping things more often than usual
- Relying on more and more memory aids to keep things straight
- Unusual behavior changes, such as becoming more anxious or suspicious
- Trouble completing everyday tasks
- Difficulty with words when speaking or writing
- Losing track of dates, seasons, and the passing of time



CAUSES

Dementia is caused by a loss of brain cells (neurons) to the extent that areas of the brain begin to struggle. While it's normal to lose some neurons as we age, people with dementia experience greater loss of brain cells, which eventually damages brain function.

RISK FACTORS

- **Age:** Being over 65
- **Genetics:** Having a parent or sibling with dementia
- **Race/ethnicity:** Older Hispanic and African Americans have higher rates of dementia
- **Heart health:** Hypertension, high cholesterol, and smoking
- **Traumatic brain injury:** Risk is increased after a head injury.

WHAT TO DO

It can feel scary to observe warning signs in yourself or your loved ones. But reaching out for help is the best next step. The problem won't go away if you ignore it.

Talk to your doctor about your concerns. They may recommend further testing to evaluate brain health. They may also encourage healthy lifestyle changes to protect your brain against further decline. These may include:

- Stop smoking.
- Address high blood pressure.
- Increase physical activity.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- Get enough quality sleep.
- Be active in a social community.
- Manage blood sugar levels.