



Let's #TalkBrainHealth!

A discussion guide for caregivers of older adults

About This Guide

Use this guide to talk with your family and friends about your current role as a caregiver, to ask for help with your caregiving responsibilities, and to identify action steps for caring for your loved one.

For additional resources on caregiving and dementia, visit www.alzfdn.org and www.caregiving.org.



About Family Caregiving, Aging, & Cognitive Screenings

Family caregivers are often the first to notice that their loved one is having trouble with their memory. In many cases, this means that the caregiver is taking on extra tasks when caring for an older adult. In cases where the older adult may have dementia, research has shown that caregivers may notice signs and symptoms up to two years before a formal diagnosis.

It's important to remember that not all memory problems are a sign of dementia or Alzheimer's disease. There are a number of reasons, such as vitamin deficiencies, thyroid problems, or depression, that a person could be experiencing memory issues. Other changes in memory may be a normal sign of aging.

When you are concerned about your loved one's memory, doctors and others qualified health professionals (such as a nurse practitioner, psychologist, or social worker) can help. Many offer memory screenings to help determine whether your loved one needs a more thorough medical evaluation.

A memory screening is a simple, non-invasive test that takes less than 10 minutes. Screenings consist of a combination of questions and tasks designed to gauge memory, thinking, and language skills. A screening is not a diagnosis, but scoring below a normal threshold can signal that your loved one should see a physician for a full evaluation.

Memory screenings are one of many tools that may help an aging loved one with memory issues.

Remember, some changes in memory result from normal aging of the brain, such as:



Change in day-to-day functions, such as driving, making financial and healthcare decisions, and understanding instructions



Forgetting details about events that happened several years ago, names of acquaintances, or occasional forgetfulness



Confusion or drowsiness that is a side-effect of current medication, or results from the interaction of multiple medications

For more information on cognitive aging, visit the Institute of Medicine's Action Guide for Patients & Families at <http://iom.nationalacademies.org/Reports/2015/Cognitive-Aging.aspx>.



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Step 1: Use this checklist as a conversation guide to determine whether your loved one might benefit from a memory screening by a qualified health professional.

I've noticed recently that my loved one has:

- Difficulty finding words in conversation, stops mid-conversation
- Trouble remembering new or recent events
- Relied frequently on memory helpers, such as reminder notes or electronic programs
- Struggled to complete familiar actions, such as paying bills or cooking a favorite recipe
- Demonstrated personality changes, such as new depression or irritability, or loss of interest in important responsibilities, withdrawing from social activities
- Made bad decisions that are out-of-character
- Confused time, places, or people, such as mistaking a family member for a different family member
- Difficulty reading, problems judging distance (such as when driving), or difficulties determining color

Learn more at <http://www.alzfdn.org/AboutDementia/warningsigns.html>

Step 2: Identify friends and family of your loved one and host an informal meeting in a comfortable place to talk about your concerns and identify ways to help.



To guide the discussion, describe the changes you've noticed, listed above. Ask others if they've noticed similar changes in behavior.

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Step 3: After discussion, identify next steps to help care for your loved one. Don't be afraid to ask for help with caregiving responsibilities if you need more support.

Potential Action Step

Person(s) Who Will Help

Learn more about brain health and warning signs of dementia.

Institute of Medicine Action Guide for Patients & Families
iom.nationalacademies.org/Reports/2015/Cognitive-Aging.aspx

Mayo Clinic - "Memory Loss - When to Seek Help"
www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alzheimers-disease/in-depth/memory-loss/art-20046326

"What Made You Think Mom Had Alzheimer's?" Report from National Alliance for Caregiving,
www.caregiving.org/research/condition-specific/

Alzheimer's Foundation of America website,
www.alzfdn.org

Continue to observe behavior and plan to discuss again as a family.

We will discuss again on _____ [date, time] at _____ [location].

Accompany your loved one or friend to a doctor appointment and share your concerns with your loved one's doctor.

The Medicare Annual Wellness visit is free for Medicare beneficiaries and includes a cognitive assessment. Learn more at www.medicare.gov/coverage/preventive-visit-and-yearly-wellness-exams.html.

Accompany your loved one to a free, confidential memory screening.

Find a screening near you at www.afascreenings.org/search-us or by calling (866) 232-8484.

Join the conversation and connect with other caregivers on Facebook & Twitter using #TalkBrainHealth!

