

Forgetfulness: When to Ask for Help

While mild forgetfulness can be a normal part of aging, it can also be a sign of more serious memory problems, such as mild cognitive impairment (MCI), dementia, or even Alzheimer's disease. It is important to communicate any noticeable changes in memory or thinking to your doctor in a timely manner.

Age-Related Changes in Memory

Forgetfulness can be a normal part of aging. As people get older, changes occur in all parts of the body, including the brain. As a result, some people may notice that it takes longer to learn new things, they don't remember information as well as they did, or they lose things like their glasses. These are usually signs of mild forgetfulness, not serious memory problems.

Some older adults also find that they don't do as well as younger people on complex memory or learning tests. Scientists have found, though, that given enough time, healthy older people can do as well as younger people do on these tests. In fact, as they age, healthy adults usually improve in areas of mental ability such as vocabulary.

Other Causes of Memory Loss

Health-Related Changes in Memory

Some memory problems may be related to health issues, some of which are treatable. For example, medication side effects, vitamin B12 deficiency, chronic alcoholism, tumors, or infections in the brain can cause memory loss. Some thyroid, kidney, or liver disorders also can lead to memory loss. A doctor should treat serious medical conditions like these as soon as possible.

Emotional-Related Changes in Memory

Emotional problems, such as stress, anxiety, or depression, can make a person more forgetful. These symptoms are often mistaken for dementia. For instance, someone who has recently retired or who is coping with the death of a spouse, relative, or friend may feel sad, lonely, worried, or bored. Trying to deal with these life changes leaves some people confused or forgetful. The memory issues caused by emotions usually are temporary and go away when the feelings fade. If these feelings last for a long time, it is important to get help from a doctor or counselor. Treatment may include counseling, medication, or both.



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Normal Aging vs. Alzheimer's disease

Normal Aging

- Making a bad decision occasionally
- Missing a monthly payment
- Forgetting which day it is and remembering it later
- Sometimes forgetting which word to use
- Losing things from time to time
- Not being able to remember the name of an acquaintance

Alzheimer's disease

- Making poor judgments and decisions
- Problems taking care of monthly bills
- Losing track of the date or time of year
- Trouble having a conversation
- Misplacing things often and being unable to find them
- Not recognizing or knowing names of family members

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 Alzheimer's
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