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Recognizing Symptoms of Dementia

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The holidays are an excellent time for family gatherings. Family visits, games, stories and everyone's favorite foods are always on the agenda. What happens when, during these visits, the family notices mom or pop seem a bit "confused." Could something be wrong with mom or dad's mental state?

One might say that for an elder person a little forgetfulness or confusion is normal, but when do you know if there is a serious problem, such as dementia?

An online article from FamilyDoctor.org outlines some common symptoms in recognizing dementia:

"Dementia causes many problems for the person who has it and for the person's family. Many of the problems are caused by memory loss. Some common symptoms of dementia are listed below. Not everyone who has dementia will experience all of these symptoms.

- **Recent memory loss.** All of us forget things for a while and then remember them later. People who have dementia often forget things, but they never remember them. They might ask you the same ques-

tion over and over, each time forgetting that you've already given them the answer. They won't even remember that they already asked the question.

- **Difficulty performing familiar tasks.** People who have dementia might cook a meal but forget to serve it. They might even forget that they cooked it.

- **Problems with language.** People who have dementia may forget simple words or use the wrong words. This makes it hard to understand what they want.

- **Time and place disorientation.** People who have dementia may get lost on their own street. They may forget how they got to a certain place and how to get back home.

- **Poor judgment.** Even a person who doesn't have dementia might get distracted. But people who have dementia can forget simple things, like forgetting to put on a coat before going out in cold weather.

- **Problems with abstract thinking.** Anybody might have trouble balancing a checkbook, but people who have dementia may forget what the numbers are and what has to be

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The choice of an attorney is an important decision and should not be based solely on advertising.

Recognizing Symptoms of Dementia

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done with them.

- **Misplacing things.** People who have dementia may put things in the wrong places. They might put an iron in the freezer or a wristwatch in the sugar bowl. Then they can't find these things later.
- **Changes in mood.** Everyone is moody at times, but people who have dementia may have fast mood swings, going from calm to tears to anger in a few minutes.
- **Personality changes.** People who have dementia may have drastic changes in personality. They might become irritable, suspicious or fearful.
- **Loss of initiative.** People who have dementia may become passive. They might not want to go places or see other people."

Dementia is caused by change or destruction of brain cells. Often this change is a result of small strokes or blockage of blood cells, severe hypothyroidism or Alzheimer's disease. There is a continuous decline in ability to perform normal daily activities. Personal care including dressing, bathing, preparing meals and even eating a meal eventually becomes impossible.

What can family members do if they suspect dementia? An appointment with the doctor or geriatric clinic is the first step to take. Depending on the cause and severity of the problem there are some medications that may help slow the process. The doctor may recommend a care facility that specializes in dementia and Alzheimer's. These facilities offer a variety of care options from day care with stimulating activities to part or full-time live-in options. Sometimes if patients tend to wander off, a locked facility is needed.

In the beginning family members find part time caregivers for their loved one. At first, loved ones need only a little help with remembering to do daily activities or prepare meals. As dementia progresses,

caregiving demands often progress to 24 hour care. Night and day become confused and normal routines of sleeping, eating and functioning become more difficult for the patient. The demented person feels frustrated and may lash out in anger or fear. It is not uncommon for a child or spouse giving the care to quickly become overwhelmed and discouraged.

Family gatherings provide an excellent opportunity to discuss caregiving plans and whole family support. It is most helpful if everyone in the family is united in supporting a family caregiver in some meaningful way.

"The first step to holding a family meeting, and perhaps the most difficult one, is to get all interested persons together in one place at one time. If it's a family gathering, perhaps a birthday, an anniversary or another special event, this could be used as a way to get all to meet. Or maybe even a special dinner might be an incentive.

The end of the meeting should consist of asking everyone present to make his or her commitment to support the plan. This might just simply be moral support and agreement to abide by the provisions, or agreement that those attending will volunteer to participate in some way. This might mean commitments to providing care, transportation, financial support, making legal arrangements or some other tangible support."

Professional home care services are an option to help families in the home. These providers are trained and skilled to help with dementia patients. Don't forget care facilities as well. It may be that the best loving care a family member can give is to place their loved one in a facility where that person is safely monitored and cared for.

(Exerpts reprinted with permission, www.longtermcarelink.net).

When a Parent Moves in With the Kids

When a surviving parent can no longer live alone, for example, when a parent has mild dementia or needs rides to get around, one option for the parent to consider is to move into an assisted-living facility near one or more of the children's homes. Another option may be for the parent to live with one of the children and his or her family.

Seniors moving in with their adult children and even their grandchildren is gaining in popularity. 28% of individuals age 65 and older lived in a multigenerational household in 2008, up from 17% in 1990, according to the Pew Research Center.

Melding households can be a positive experience for everyone. The family can bond while playing games and eating meals. "Look at this as an opportunity," says Amy Goyer, AARP's family expert. "You have a chance to enjoy your mom or dad in their later years. This is a way for children to know their grandparents in ways they wouldn't otherwise."

But before a parent moves in with an adult son or daughter, they will need to decide whether they will feel comfortable living in someone else's home. You'll no longer rule the roost as you did when your child was a child. Also imagine day-to-day life with grandchildren and maybe pets. If you have no tolerance for noise, do you want to move into a house with children or teenagers?

Meanwhile, the adult child needs to be prepared for the drain of time, energy and possibly money that could come with having one or two parents move in. The new arrangement could also put a strain on a marriage. And if a parent needs caregiving, you'll need to be realistic about what that entails. Families generally underestimate the amount of care that Mom is going to

require: Even if Mom moves in relatively healthy, that could change overnight.

Talk Through All Issues

Before making a decision, the two generations should discuss all the issues, including privacy concerns, sharing meals, recreation, and the division of chores. Sit down and ask, what are everyone's expectations? What are you uncomfortable about? Once the families are combined, meet regularly to air any concerns.

Have a candid conversation about money issues. Is the parent able to sustain him or herself? Or, will the adult child need to subsidize some of their parent's expenses? Together you should determine a fair amount for the parent to pay for meals, utilities, cable costs and phone bills, and even for a home addition. "It makes the parent feel not as much as an intruder, but a partner in the space," says Ronald Fatoullah, an elder-law attorney in New York City.

Another issue is figuring out what to do with the parent's furniture and other possessions. If a senior moves into a son or daughter's house and tries to take it over with their stuff, there's going to be a problem. A parent should consider putting his or her possessions in storage for a six-month trial period of living with the adult child.

The adult child can hire a geriatric-care manager to assess the home as well as the kind of care an aging parent may need. Find a care manager through the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers at www.caremanager.org.

Excerpts from: Kiplinger's Retirement Report, November 2010

Christmas Trivia Answers: (1) Jacob Marley; (2) Bob Cratchit; (3) A button; (4) 364 presents; (5) Parson Brown; (6) Our Jesus Christ is born! (7) A jolly, happy soul; (8) False: An angel told Mary the news; (9) Mommy.

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South County Senior Law & Estate Planning Center, LLC has been serving the needs of our senior clients for twenty years. The firm attorneys, Dennis B. Mertz, Mavis Kennedy, and Christine F. Hart are members of NAELA, Inc. (National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys), dedicated to meeting the legal needs of all persons of all ages, including seniors.

We concentrate our practices in the areas of estate planning, trusts and estates, powers of attorney, probate, asset preservation, including Medicaid planning and tax advice, Special Needs Trusts and trust administration, nursing home abuse, will contests and other contested estate matters, financial exploitation of the elderly, personal injury, and guardianships and conservatorships. The initial consultation with any of our senior law attorneys is always at no charge or obligation to employ our firm. Call us at (314) 845-0541 to schedule an appointment to discuss any of your legal questions.

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Anyone wishing to be added to our newsletter mailing list should contact our office at (314) 845-0541 with your request.

*Mavis Kennedy is a Certified Elder Law Attorney by the National Elder Law Foundation, the only elder law certification program accredited by the American Bar Association. Certified Elder Law Attorneys offer the specialized knowledge, skills and experience to resolve legal issues that affect older people and the disabled.

(Neither the Supreme Court nor the Bar of Missouri reviews or approves certifying organizations or specialist designations).

CHRISTMAS TRIVIA QUESTIONS

1. The name of Scrooge's deceased business partner in Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol"?
2. What is the name of Tiny Tim's father in the story "A Christmas Carol"?
3. What did Frosty the Snowman have for a nose?
4. How many gifts would you receive if you received all of the gifts in the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas"?
5. In the song "Winter Wonderland", who do we pretend the snowman is?
6. In the traditional song "Go Tell It on the Mountain", what are you supposed to go tell on a mountain?
7. According to the song "Frosty the Snowman", what kind of soul does Frosty have?
8. True or False: Joseph was the one that told Mary she was going to have a baby.
9. In one popular Christmas song, who did I (the narrator) see kissing Santa Claus under the mistletoe last night?

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No Social Security COLA for 2011

The Social Security Administration announced on October 15, 2010, that social security and supplemental security income (SSI) benefits for more than 58 million Americans will not automatically increase in 2011.

The Social Security Act provides for automatic increases in social security and SSI benefits if there is an increase in the consumer price index for urban wage earners and clerical workers (CPI-W) from the prior cost of living adjustment (COLA) to the third quarter of the current year. There has been no increase in the CPI-W since 2008; therefore, there can be no COLA in 2011.