

## What If a Loved One Shows Signs of Alzheimer's Disease? Start a Conversation.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, one in ten Americans age 65 or older has Alzheimer's disease.<sup>1</sup> Increasing age is the greatest known risk factor.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes symptoms of Alzheimer's disease are confused with those of normal aging, so it's helpful to know the difference. Several warning signs of Alzheimer's disease are highlighted here.

Noticing some of these or other signs of problems with thinking and behavior in a loved one is often alarming and scary, but don't ignore them. Early detection and treatment of Alzheimer's disease can make a big difference in quality of life for both of you. Starting a conversation about what you've noticed is the first thing to do. It's also one of the hardest. Here are a few tips.

**Plan a time and place.** Choose a time to have the conversation when you and your loved one aren't busy or tired. If you include others in the conversation, keep the group small. Pick a place that is familiar, comfortable, quiet and free of distractions.

**Find the words.** Think about what you're going to say in advance to make the conversation easier. It's helpful to begin by asking your loved one if they've noticed any differences in their behavior or memory. They might be defensive or embarrassed, so tell them you're concerned and give a few examples of what you have noticed.

**Talk and listen with compassion.** Keep your words simple, gentle and reassuring. And be patient. Listen when your loved one expresses their own worry about memory loss or their difficulty in doing usual activities. They might be relieved to know that you are willing to discuss it with them.

**Encourage them to see a doctor.** Explain that a doctor will talk with them about their concerns and begin looking for what is causing the symptoms. To provide support, offer to go to the doctor with them. Take notes about your concerns and the changes you've noticed to share with the doctor.

### Some Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

It's time to start a conversation if your loved one:

- Forgets the name of their child or a close friend.
- Asks the same question over and over.
- Doesn't recognize familiar places.
- Puts things in unusual places, such as keys in the fridge.
- Has trouble following a conversation.
- Calls familiar things by the wrong name.
- Loses track of dates and seasons.
- Forgets routine activities, such as paying monthly bills.

The Alzheimer's Disease Program at the Texas Department of State Health Services works to increase awareness of the disease and provide helpful information to individuals, families, friends and caregivers. Visit the program's website at [dshs.texas.gov/alzheimers](https://dshs.texas.gov/alzheimers) to learn more about Alzheimer's disease, ways to start a conversation, and available community resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Alzheimer's Association. Alzheimer's disease facts and figures. <https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/alzheimers-facts-and-figures.pdf>. 2020. Accessed July 24, 2020.