

THE BABY BOOMER'S HANDBOOK ON HELPING PARENTS RECEIVE CARE FOR MEMORY PROBLEMS

This book contains tips and information about helping parents or family seek care for memory problems.

This book contains:

1. A 15-Point Dementia Risk Factor Inventory
2. Q&A On Talking With Parents Of Family About Dementia
3. Ten Benefits For The Parent In Recognizing Dementia Early
 4. Twelve Early Warning Signs Of Dementia
 5. Ten Commandments to Dementia Prevention

THE BABY BOOMER’S BRAIN CHALLENGE

This inventory includes many known risk factors for developing age-related intellectual loss with aging in persons over age 55. You can use the same inventory to assess the risk profile in your patients. There are many reasons why people develop dementia, especially Alzheimer’s disease. Genetics plays some role in the development of dementia; however, health problems and life choices may increase risks for intellectual loss in later life.

This inventory will NOT predict your risks for developing dementia. This checklist provides you with important questions about known risk factors for developing intellectual loss with aging. Each positive answer should represent motivation to follow a healthy brain lifestyle. See tips included in the www.alzbrain.org website for more details.

		Yes
1.	Do I have a lot of problems with my memory?	
2.	Do I have untreated high blood pressure?	
3.	Am I very over weight?	
4.	Is my waistline greater than 40 for male or 35 for female of average height?	
5.	Do I eat a poor diet?	
6.	Do I usually forget to take my daily vitamins?	
7.	Do I have severe bouts of depression and not take my medicine to fix the depression?	
8.	Do I drink more than two ounces of alcohol per day?	
9.	Have I had a stroke?	
10.	Do I have poorly controlled diabetes?	
11.	Do I have a strong family history for dementia?	
12.	Do I have close family members who developed dementia before the age of 60?	
13.	Am I a “couch potato” who rarely exercises?	
14.	Is my intellectual life limited to watching television?	
15.	Is my social and spiritual life severely limited?	

Each check indicates more conditions associated with memory loss in later life.

A BABY BOOMER'S GUIDE TO DEALING WITH MEMORY PROBLEMS IN THEIR PARENTS

- 1. Are memory problems common in older people? Yes.**

Over half of people over the age of 65 will have some memory complaints. Only a small percentage (10%) of older people will develop dementia. Dementia is the permanent loss of multiple intellectual functions such as memory, communication, motor skills, and others.
- 2. What are signs to worry about in my parents?**

Occasional memory troubles are common over the age of 65. If the memory trouble is severe enough to disrupt daily life or routine activities, then this person should seek a medical evaluation. If the person has memory troubles and is having difficulties finding their words or has experienced a significant change in their personality, then that person should be evaluated by a specialist in memory disorders (**See the Twelve Warning Signs of Dementia**).
- 3. My parent might become angry when I ask them about their memory troubles. Why should I distress them by pointing out a health problem?**

Memory problems can be caused by many health and brain problems. Hormonal problems such as thyroid disorder, depression, sleep problems (sleep apnea), incorrect medications, and many other treatable health problems may improve memory or stop the loss of intellectual function.
- 4. The last time my parent became angry when I asked about their memory problem. Why should I cause them more distress by pushing the subject?**

Memory troubles are very scary for the person that is experiencing the difficulty. Many older people think they are going “crazy” when they are losing their memory. Others believe that they will be sent to a nursing home, have their driver’s license taken away, or be forced to take medication. The reason for a memory evaluation is to find and treat problems that might cause memory difficulties. New medicines slow the progress of diseases like Alzheimer’s disease but these treatments work best in the early stages.
- 5. My parent sees a doctor every three to six months. The doctor never said anything about the memory problem. Wouldn’t they say something to my parents if they thought it was serious?**

The doctor might not be aware of the memory problem. Most doctors do not screen for memory disorders in people over the age of 65. Most memory disorders remain undiagnosed until persons are in the middle stages of the disease. Diagnosing and treating dementia takes time for the doctor. Economic pressures in the doctor’s office often limit the doctor’s time with the patient.
- 6. What if I encourage my parent to go for an evaluation and the doctor believes that they have early Alzheimer’s disease?**

New medicines are available that may slow the progress of Alzheimer’s disease by almost 2 years and help to keep people out of nursing homes. Doctors should adjust their management of a forgetful patient and work with the family to make sure that the person stays in good health.

7. What if my parent falls apart emotionally when we tell them that they have Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's disease does not make a person lose awareness early in the disease. Most persons with memory troubles know that they have a serious health problem that might get worse. The doctor and the family need to send a powerful message of support and reassurance. No two patients are the same and some people with memory troubles hold onto most of their intellect for most of their life. Families must decide whether they want to create a positive, safe, supportive environment, or wait until an emergency or catastrophe happens, such as a car wreck, a fire or an avoidable health complication. Either way, the family will be forced to deal with the situation.

8. What if I encourage my parent to have a memory evaluation and it turns out that they have a normal memory function?

Then you and your parents should rejoice and use the opportunity to protect their brain. Families should obey the ten commandments of dementia prevention to help their parents hold memories for as long as possible in life. Genes play a role in about half the risk factors for dementia and health choices may play the other half (See 10 Commandments to Dementia Prevention).

9. What is the difference between dementia and Alzheimer's disease?

Dementia means that a person is losing many intellectual functions. The most common cause of dementia in people over the age of 65 is Alzheimer's disease; however, there are 4 or 5 other common types of dementia such as frontotemporal dementia, vascular dementia, etc., that can also cause intellectual loss. Each disease has a somewhat different treatment and different genetic risk factors.

10. Does my risk for dementia increase if my parent has this disorder?

Some forms of dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease, have some genetic risks while other disorders, such as vascular dementia, may be less dependent upon genes. Families need to seek an accurate diagnosis to help the parent with dementia and to help inform younger family members.

11. How does an accurate family history help my family members?

Future treatments for dementia will focus on preventing brain injury before the disease begins. Certain diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease, begin to damage the brain after age 50 in some individuals. New treatments will focus on slowing that disease process. A family member may benefit from knowing what kind of disease is present in the family. The doctor has the best chance of making an accurate diagnosis when the patient is in the early stage of the disease.

12. How do I get an accurate diagnosis?

Dementia requires a careful evaluation by a doctor or nurse practitioner who has been trained in diagnosing these diseases. A dementia assessment takes about an hour of physician time and then may require multiple other tests to include blood and brain imaging. Some patients require paper and pencil testing called "neuropsychological evaluations".

13. My parent is very independent and proud. My parent may be embarrassed or outraged by our intruding in their business. Isn't it disrespectful to question the intellectual ability and independence of a person who seems to be doing well?

The goal of treating memory problems is to maintain that independence and dignity. Your goal is to allow them to live in a setting of their choice for as long as possible and as safe as possible. You are trying to help them safeguard themselves against avoidable health problems, exploitation by crooked businessmen, and accidental injury that can disable the person for life. The goal is to maintain independence, dignity, and self-respect.

14. How can unrecognized memory problems cause health problems?

Persons with memory troubles may forget to take medicines on schedule or make take multiple doses of the same medicine on the same day. Older persons with memory troubles may forget to follow doctor's instructions or accurately report symptoms to the doctor. Persons with unrecognized memory troubles may become severely confused from over-the-counter medications, prescription drugs, or health problems such as pneumonia or bladder infection.

15. How can treating dementia reduce the risk for exploitation or injury?

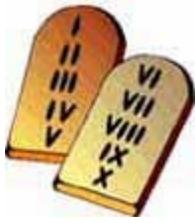
Persons with unrecognized memory troubles are prime targets for telephone scammers and door-to-door salesmen. Persons with unrecognized memory problems may pay their bills several times or fall victim to exploitation by dishonest family members. Persons with unrecognized dementia are at greater risk for accidental injury and broken hips that produce disability and serious loss of independence. Families can help parents protect themselves against exploitation or injury.

10 WAYS THAT RECOGNIZING DEMENTIA MAY HELP YOUR PARENTS

1. Corrects treatable causes of memory troubles.
2. Slows the progress of some dementias.
3. Improves medical and hospital care.
4. Reduces risk for accidental injuries.
5. Avoids complications from over-the-counter medications.
6. Allows the parent to organize and safely manage their personal business.
7. Reduces risk of avoidable problems that cause a parent to move from their home.
8. Protects against financial exploitation.
9. Protects against abuse by others.
10. Improves the quality of everyone's life by reducing anxiety and stress.

THE AFA 12 WARNING SIGNS FOR DEMENTIA

1. Trouble with new memories.
2. Relying on memory helpers.
3. Trouble finding words.
4. Struggling to complete familiar actions.
5. Confusion about time, place or people.
6. Misplacing familiar objects.
7. Onset of new depression or irritability.
8. Making bad decisions.
9. Personality changes.
10. Loss of interest in important responsibilities.
11. Seeing or hearing things.
12. Expressing false beliefs.



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR Preventing dementia

- I. Thou shalt use thy brain for thy whole life. Your brain is a “use it” or “lose it” organ.
- II. Thou shalt not become a couch potato. Obesity, inactivity, and poor health are bad for your brain.
- III. Thou shalt exercise until the day thy die.
People who exercise on a regular basis have better physical and intellectual life.
- IV. Thou shalt not keep a spare tire. Obesity around the belt line in middle life is bad for your brain in later life.
- V. Thou shalt protect thy heart and blood vessels.
Your brain needs adequate oxygen and nutrients to stay well.
- VI. Thou shalt treat thy hypertension as a young person to keep thy memories as an old person. Untreated hypertension damages blood vessels in the brain.
- VII. Thou shalt take a STANDARD vitamin on a daily basis.
B-Complex vitamins and Folic acid are helpful.
- VIII. Thou shalt fix thy depression and encourage thy neighbor to fix their depression.
Treating depression may improve your physical and intellectual health. Pass the good news to a friend.
- IX. Thou shalt avoid gluttony with food and alcohol.
Excessive alcohol and elevated cholesterol or triglycerides are bad for the brain.
- X. Thou shalt find a good doctor and follow their advice.
Smart doctors and wonder drugs are not beneficial when the advice and the medication sit in the medicine cabinet.