

## **Senior "Warning Signs" What To Watch For In The Elderly**

If you care about an older person, and if you see any of the warning signs below, it would be a good idea to look a little closer. Aging doesn't inevitably have to result in forgetfulness or the inability to manage our personal care needs. So if your elder is showing signs of problems with coping with daily life there's a good chance something is going on.

Whether your elder isn't feeling well, is becoming forgetful, or is possibly depressed, these warning signs tell us that things are not right.

Forgetting a word or a name now and then isn't cause for worry. However, do plan to investigate further if you think there might be a significant pattern developing.

This is the one time it's OK to snoop in the medicine cabinet. Looking at the prescription medications your elder is taking will tell you what the doctor is treating - and whether the pills are actually being taken. If there's a full bottle of pills dated some time ago you'll know the prescription got filled, but the medication isn't doing anyone any good in the bottle.

Unless you see something that's obviously dangerous, try not to jump in to "fix" things until you have a good idea of what, if anything, really needs to be fixed. Trouble with managing around the house could be due to any one of a hundred things.

Does your elder have arthritis that's making movement painful? How long has it been since she had an eye exam and new glasses? Does he hesitate to ask for a ride to the store or the post office, and so does without instead? Has she always been messy and a little scatterbrained?

Talk with other family members if you can before you jump to conclusions. Have others seen what you're seeing? Are they concerned about the same things you are? Have they already tried, with or without success, to do something?

Talk with your parent, quietly and privately. Ask her what her concerns are. Mention the one thing that concerns you most: "Mom, it must be hard for you to get to the back of the refrigerator. Can I give the 'fridge a good scrub while I'm here?"

## Senior "Warning Signs" - What to Watch For in the Elderly

---

If your parent hasn't seen a doctor in a while, the first step is to try to get a complete physical. This may take more than one conversation if the doctor hasn't been a regular priority. Often, people avoid seeing the doctor because they're afraid of bad news. Make it a favor your parent can do for you: "Dad, I won't be able to sleep well until I know you've seen Dr. Johnson. Please, do it for me."

A little extra help now and then might solve whatever the problem is. Sometimes just knowing that someone is coming every week or two to scrub the bathrooms and run the vacuum is enough. Or, it might be time to start looking for more regular in-home help. Don't jump right to the conclusion that your parent needs to move to supportive living right away . . . but it never hurts to have a look around your community to see what's available, just in case.

### Senior "Warning Signs" to Watch For

- Most Important Daily Activities -	
_____ Walking	_____ Dressing
_____ Eating	_____ Bathing
_____ Using the toilet	_____ Managing Medications

#### Notes & observations:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**- Personal Care & Hygiene -**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unclean clothing                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Body odor     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mouth odor                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Hair unwashed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nails (hand & feet) dirty or long |  |

**Notes & observations:**

---

---

---

---

---

**- Mental & Emotional Warning Signs -**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Easily angered                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Argues excessively     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cries easily                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of interest       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Has gotten lost                 | <input type="checkbox"/> "Loses" the right word |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Verbally or physically abusive  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Repetitive questions or stories |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forgets new information         |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased alcohol or drug use   |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Always wears the same clothing  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paranoid and suspicious         |   |

## Senior "Warning Signs" - What to Watch For in the Elderly

---

### Notes & observations:

---

---

---

---

---

### - Warning Signs of Possible Health Problems -

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unusual weight loss          | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of energy   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unusual weight gain          | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor hearing     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sleeps excessively           | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor vision      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Has trouble sleeping         | <input type="checkbox"/> Pain when moving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poor eating habits           | <input type="checkbox"/> Bruises          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Swollen legs, ankles or feet |   |

### Notes & observations:

---

---

---

---

---

**- Household Warning Signs -**

- House smells musty or unclean
- House looks unclean
- Refrigerator is dirty
- Spoiled food
- Not much food in the house
- Food is left out
- Burns on the counters
- Accumulated dirty dishes
- Accumulated garbage or trash
- Dead or dying houseplants
- Obvious fire hazards
- Stains or burns around a favorite chair or the bed
- New dents in the car or garage walls

**Notes & observations:**

---

---

---

---

---

**- Daily Business Warning Signs -**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Unopened mail
- \_\_\_\_\_ Overdue bills
- \_\_\_\_\_ Illegible checkbook
- \_\_\_\_\_ Unfilled prescriptions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lots of unread newspapers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Disorganized clutter
- \_\_\_\_\_ Large quantities of magazines & sweepstakes envelopes

**Notes & observations:**

---

---

---

---

---

---

After you have reviewed these warning signs, discuss your notes and observations with anyone else who might also be concerned about the welfare of your seniors. They may have noticed some of the same things you are seeing. They may also be able to shed some light on possible underlying causes for signs that are making you worry.