

Is It Time to Get Help?

Just like the ten warning signs of dementia, warning signs that a loved one living independently might need more help may not be a single bold sign. Instead, there may be a combination of things or smaller “red flags” adding up to the fact that more help, or a move, is needed.



Often, just asking the question, “when is my loved one no longer safe to live alone?” can indicate that it is time to get in-home help or look at a move to a care community.

There is no simple answer as each person and situation is individual. However, we have shared below some points to keep in mind.

1. Safety
 - a. Do you worry about her all of the time? How often are you checking in, calling, or not going out because you cannot leave her alone?
 - b. Have there been many falls, medication challenges or wandering episodes that stress you daily?
 - c. Does she feel safe at home? Does she have concerns that keep her up at night?
2. Caregiver Burnout
 - a. Are you and/or other caregivers exhausted? Do you find yourself being short, easily angered, with low patience?
 - b. Are you sleep deprived? Missing a lot of work?
 - c. Is your health at risk?
3. Increased healthcare needs
 - a. Is his/her health more at risk by being alone or are the needs beyond your abilities as the caregiver?
 - b. Have doctor visits and/hospital visits been increasing due to increased care needs?
4. Socialization
 - a. Is your loved one isolated? Would they benefit from being around others on a daily basis?
 - b. Do they have a fear of being alone? Are they paranoid or suspicious for seemingly unfound reasons?
5. Have there been unexplained physical changes?
 - a. When you hug your loved one can you tell there has been significant weight change?
 - b. Are there changes in posture, difficulty with balance, movement or how they get around?
 - c. Are there signs of recent falls such as unexplained bruising?
6. Hygiene
 - a. Have you noticed changes in hygiene such as body odor, wearing out of season clothing, wearing clothing inappropriately or wearing the same thing repeatedly?
 - b. Have shaving or mouth care habits changed?

7. Money

- a. Have there been changes in finances, warnings of late or no payment for bills? Have there been changes in purchasing habits or money given away that is out of the ordinary?
- b. Is your loved one uncharacteristically buying multiples of items and either not remembering they already have the item or saving just in case where they would not have done this before?

8. Living Conditions

- a. Have you seen signs of staining, mold, or burns (kitchen towels singed)? Water damage where sinks might have overflowed? Laundry not being done or getting clean?
 - b. Are you noticing food that has passed its expiration dates? Moldy foods?
 - c. Are there expired medications that have gone unnoticed?
9. Are they still as organized as they have always been, or are things slipping?
 10. Would they benefit from 24-hour supervision?
 11. Are they experiencing aggression, wandering or “sun downing”?
 12. In the event of an emergency, would your loved one be able to follow appropriate emergency procedures such as calling 9-1-1 and evacuating to somewhere safe?

If you decide it might be time to explore your options, call Dementia Alliance of North Carolina for resources and support. You may also want to speak with your regional Long-term Care Ombudsman, a geriatric care manager, ask support group members, research online, talk to friends about their experiences, visit local care communities and learn about alternate options that may enable your loved one to live at home as long as possible.



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