

**Remember this date: National Memory Screening Day is Tuesday, Nov. 13**



***Q: My father, who is 72, has become very forgetful lately and he is worried that he may have Alzheimer's. Is his forgetfulness really something we should worry about? What should we do?***

***A:*** Many seniors worry about memory lapses as they get older, fearing it may be the first signs of Alzheimer's disease or some other type of dementia. To get some insight on the seriousness of your father's problem, here are some key warning signs to be aware of and some resources you can turn to for help.

### Warning Signs

As we grow older, some memory difficulties — such as trouble remembering names of people or places, or forgetting where you put your glasses — are associated with normal aging. But the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease are much more than simple memory lapses. Knowing the early warning signs is a good first step in recognizing the difference between typical age-related memory loss and a more serious problem.

To help you evaluate your father's condition, here's a checklist of some common early symptoms to watch for:

- Asking the same questions repeatedly.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Getting lost in familiar areas.

## Does a Fading Memory Always Signal Alzheimer's?

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- Failing to recognize familiar people.
- Having difficulty following directions.
- Misplaces items in inappropriate places, for example putting his keys in the microwave.
- Having difficulty completing familiar tasks like cooking a meal or paying a bill.
- Having trouble remembering common words when speaking, or mixing up words.

For more information, the Alzheimer's Association provides a list of 10 warning signs that you can access at [10signs.org](http://10signs.org), or call 800-272-3900 and request a free copy of their booklet "Basics of Alzheimer's Disease: What it is and what you can do."

Another good screening tool is the self-administered cognitive screening (SAGE) test that was developed at The Ohio State University Medical Center. This test helps identify mild cognitive impairment and early dementia, and can be taken at home in about 10 to 15 minutes. You can download the SAGE test, along with scoring instructions, at [sagetest.osu.edu](http://sagetest.osu.edu).

### Get Help

After going through the warning signs and/or testing of your dad, if you're still concerned, get him in to see his doctor for a thorough medical examination. His doctor may then refer him to a geriatrician or neurologist who specializes in diagnosing and treating memory loss or Alzheimer's disease.

Keep in mind that even if your dad is experiencing some memory problems, it doesn't necessarily mean he has early-stage Alzheimer's. Many memory problems are brought on by other factors like stress, depression, thyroid disease, side effects of medications, sleep disorders, vitamin deficiencies and other medical conditions. And, by treating these conditions, he can reduce or eliminate the problem.

### Free Memory Screening

Another option you should know about is National Memory Screening Day on Tuesday, Nov. 13, where your dad can get his memory tested for free. Sponsored by the Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA), this free service provides a confidential, face-to-face memory screening that takes about 10 minutes to complete and consists of questions and/or tasks to evaluate his memory status.

The screening is administered by doctors, nurse practitioners, psychologists, social workers or other healthcare professionals in more than 2,500 sites across the country. It's also important to know that this screening is not a diagnosis. Instead, its goal is to detect problems and refer individuals with these problems for further evaluation.

To find a screening site in your area, visit [nationalmemoryscreening.org](http://nationalmemoryscreening.org) or call 866-232-8484. The AFA recommends checking for a screening location shortly before Nov. 13, because new sites are constantly being added.