

Assessing Age-Related Declines

In the beginning of the year, we often receive calls from family members who have been home for the holidays and are concerned about Mom or Dad.

If the person has been diagnosed with dementia, seek assistance now. But if the path isn't so clear, how do you know when your concerns are justified? Hunches don't often come from nowhere. Take a look at the following checklist. If you are routinely noticing several of these issues, it is probably time to discuss scheduling a doctor's visit. Tell the physician you would like an assessment for age-related safety issues.

- Missing appointments, forgetfulness and confusion regarding medications
- Unexplained bruising or marks on his or her body
- Repeated phone calls at odd hours
- Trouble getting up from a seated position or with walking, balance and mobility
- Infrequent showering and bathing or strong smell of urine in the house
- Decline in grooming habits, dressing habits and personal care
- Uncertainty and confusion when performing once-familiar tasks
- Household chores are going undone
- Spoiled food in the home that doesn't get thrown away or scorched pots and pans
- Poor diet or weight loss
- Stacks of unopened mail, late payments or bounced checks
- Loss of interest in hobbies and activities
- Changes in mood or extreme mood swings
- Unexplained dents and scratches on a car
- Symptoms of depression such as lack of interest in old activities, crying, listlessness

Being Prepared to Help: A Checklist

1. Gather current records of your parents' health insurance, medical history, physicians and contact numbers and medications. Update them every six months.
2. Make a list of important documents and information such as a will and living wills, bank, investment and credit card accounts, social security number and insurance policies.
3. Get a basic outline of your parents' monthly expenses and income.
4. Suggest creating power of attorney and advance directive documents.
5. Contact our Asbury Home Services office in Erie to conduct a Home Safety Assessment.
6. When hiring caregivers, interview the company and the caregiver that would be assigned. Make sure the agency conducts thorough background checks.
7. Contact your local Office on Aging for information on area resources.