Signs a Parent Needs More Help

A checklist of the signs families most often notice, sorted by what to do about each one: call now, fix this week, or watch and write it down.

One sign is a bad day. Several signs in the same area, or signs that keep coming back, are a pattern. Tick what you've seen, then look at the column on the right.

Area	Signs you might notice	What to do	Seen it?
Safety	Falls or near-falls, unexplained bruises, burned pots, doors left unlocked, getting lost	Fix this week; call the doctor about falls	
Medicines	Pills left over or running out early, confusion about doses, old bottles mixed with new	Fix this week; ask the pharmacist	
Eating	Weight loss, spoiled food, an empty refrigerator, one food at every meal	Watch; call the doctor about weight loss	
Personal care	Same clothes for days, body odor, unwashed hair, skipped showers	Watch; ask gently what's hard	
The house	Clutter, dishes and laundry piling up, unusual mess for them, pests	Watch; arrange help	
Money and mail	Unpaid bills, shut-off notices, piles of unopened mail, new "friends" or scam calls	Fix this week	
Memory and thinking	Repeating stories, missed appointments, trouble following a conversation, getting lost on familiar roads	Call the doctor for a visit	
Mood	Withdrawal, no interest in things they loved, anxiety, sleeping all day	Call the doctor	
Getting out	Stopped driving or shouldn't be driving, stopped seeing friends, missing church or clubs	Watch; talk about it	
Health	Not keeping appointments, new or worsening problems no one is following	Call the doctor	

Call now

Call 911 for a fall with injury, chest pain, trouble breathing, sudden confusion or weakness, or signs of a stroke.

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Write down what you see

A dated note is more useful to a doctor, and harder for a sibling to dismiss, than "Mom seems off."

Date	What I saw or heard	Who else noticed

Before you decide anything

- ☐ Spend a longer visit, a whole day if you can. A phone call or a holiday dinner can hide a lot.
- ☐ Ask your parent what they've noticed and what feels hard. Listen before you suggest.
- ☐ Rule out the treatable: new medicines, infections, hearing or vision changes, and depression can all look like decline. Ask the doctor.
- ☐ Share what you've written down with the rest of the family.

Your parent leads, when they can. Most decisions are theirs to make, and health questions belong with their doctor. This checklist helps your family organize and take the next step together.

The Family Caregiver Quick-Start: 1. Can No Longer Live Alone: What to Do First · 2. Signs a Parent Needs More Help · 3. Preparing for a Family Care Meeting · 4. Choosing a Home Care Agency · 5. Preparing for a Home Care Assessment · 6. What to Bring to a Medical Appointment · 7. Organizing a Parent's Important Information. All at AgingAtHomeSupport.com/caregiver-quick-start/

To keep notes, medicines and contacts in one shared place, see The Family Care Binder at AgingAtHomeSupport.com/book/caregiver-binder/

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