When a Loved One Needs More Help at Home

Recognising the signs that extra support is needed

Caring for someone with dementia often feels like a gradual shift. One week you notice a missed bill, the next a forgotten meal. These small changes can be easy to dismiss, but they often point to a bigger need: the person you care for may require more day-to-day support than they currently have. Knowing what to look for can help you act early, before a small problem becomes a crisis.

This article walks through the common signs that a person with a cognitive impairment might be struggling more than they let on. Each sign comes with a practical reason why it matters, so you can decide what kind of help makes sense. The goal is to keep your loved one as independent as possible while making sure their safety and wellbeing are covered.

Missed meals and weight changes

One of the first things to go is the daily routine around food. A person who used to cook simple meals may start skipping breakfast or eating the same thing every day. You might find expired food in the fridge or notice that the pantry is nearly empty. Weight loss is a clear signal that nutrition has slipped, but weight gain can also happen if someone is eating only easy, processed items.

The reason this matters goes beyond nutrition. Eating is a complex task that involves planning, shopping, preparing, and remembering to actually eat. When any part of that chain breaks, it suggests the person can no longer manage their own meals safely. A care plan that includes meal delivery, a family roster for grocery shopping, or a wearable device with a reminder function could fill the gap.

Neglected personal care

Personal hygiene is another area that declines gradually. You might notice that your loved one is wearing the same clothes several days in a row, or that they seem reluctant to shower or bathe. Bad smells, unwashed hair, and untidy nails are all signs that the person is finding self-care difficult.


SOS

This is not about laziness. Cognitive impairment can make the sequence of steps involved in washing or dressing confusing. The person may feel anxious about falling in the bathroom or simply forget that they need to wash. A home care worker or a family caregiver can help with these tasks without taking away the person's dignity. Sometimes a simple change, like installing grab rails or a shower seat, makes it possible for the person to manage on their own for longer.

Unpaid bills and disorganised finances

Money management is one of the hardest tasks to keep up with when memory and executive function decline. Look for unopened mail, overdue bills, or unusual spending patterns. You may find that the person has paid the same invoice twice or has not paid anything at all. They might also be vulnerable to scams or pressure from callers.

Financial disorganisation is a strong indicator that the person needs help with their day-to-day administration. It is also a safety risk. A trusted family member or a professional fiduciary can take over bill paying and budgeting. Some families use a shared online account that gives several people visibility, which helps catch problems early without removing the person's sense of control.

Wandering and getting lost

Dementia can affect a person's sense of direction even in familiar places. Your loved one may go for a walk and not find their way home, or they might leave the house at odd hours and end up disoriented. This is one of the most worrying signs because it puts the person at risk of injury, exposure, or traffic accidents.

Wandering is not always aimless. Sometimes the person is trying to go somewhere they remember, like a childhood home or a former workplace. Reducing the risk involves a mix of practical steps: securing doors and windows, adding locks that are out of sight, and making sure the person carries identification. A dementia GPS tracker can be a practical addition to a care network. Devices like the Familyr wearable medical alarm use location tracking and a feature called GPS Safezone, which alerts family members if the person leaves a safe area. This kind of support allows the person to move around more freely while their family can relax a little.

Unusual mood changes or withdrawal

Changes in mood and behaviour often signal that something is wrong. Your loved one might seem irritable, anxious, or tearful without an obvious reason. They may withdraw from social

activities they used to enjoy or become defensive when you ask how they are. These shifts can be a response to frustration, confusion, or the feeling of losing control.

Social withdrawal is particularly important because it can lead to isolation, which worsens both mental and physical health. A family caregiver or a support worker can provide companionship and structure. Sometimes a simple daily routine, like a regular phone call or a weekly outing, helps the person feel more connected. If the mood changes are severe, it may be worth checking with a doctor whether there is an underlying infection or pain that the person cannot describe.



Falls and mobility problems

Falls are a common reason why someone with dementia needs more support. Look for bruises, limping, or a new reluctance to walk. The person may start holding onto furniture or walls for balance. A fall can be frightening and can lead to serious injury, especially if the person lives alone and cannot get help quickly.

Mobility problems often have simple fixes. Removing trip hazards like loose rugs, improving lighting, and installing handrails in key spots can make a big difference. A wearable medical alarm with fall detection can call for help automatically if a fall happens. This kind of device gives the person confidence to move around their home and gives the family peace of mind that help is never far away.

Difficulty managing medications

Taking the right pills at the right time is a task that many people with cognitive impairment find hard. You might find pills scattered on the counter, or notice that the person has taken a dose

twice or missed it entirely. This is dangerous because missed doses can lead to serious health problems, while double doses can cause overdose.

A medication management system, such as a pre-filled weekly box or a pill dispenser with alarms, can help. Some families use a shared calendar or a phone reminder. If the person is already struggling, it may be time to have someone visit daily to supervise medication. This is one area where a small amount of support can prevent a large medical emergency.

When to start a conversation about more support

No single sign on its own means you need to step in immediately. But when several of these signs appear together, it is a good time to talk openly with your loved one about what kind of help they would accept. Frame the conversation around safety and independence. For example, you might say, "I noticed you have been missing meals lately. Would it help if I dropped off dinner a few times a week?" rather than "You cannot cook anymore."

Involving the person in the decision makes it more likely they will accept the support. Start with the least intrusive option, like a weekly check-in or a simple home modification, and increase the level of help only as needed. A care plan that is reviewed every few months can adapt to the person's changing needs without taking away their sense of autonomy.



Technology can play a supporting role. A dementia care tracker, such as the Familyr wearable device, combines location tracking, fall detection, and SOS calling in one unit. The GPS Safezone feature lets you set safe areas and receive an alert if the person leaves them. This kind of tool does not replace human care, but it can extend the time a person lives safely at home and reduce the worry for their family.

Trust your instincts

If you have a feeling that something is off, pay attention. Family members are often the first to notice subtle changes that a doctor or a professional might miss. The signs in this article are a starting point, not a checklist you must meet before you act. Every person with dementia is

different, and the right level of support depends on their personality, their home environment, and your availability.

Getting support early can prevent a crisis and help your loved one stay in their own home longer. It also protects your own wellbeing as a caregiver. You do not have to do everything alone. A care network that includes family, friends, community services, and technology can share the load and keep your loved one safe, comfortable, and as independent as possible.