

Do you know the 10 warning signs of Alzheimer's disease?

by Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia

Currently, there are more than 17,000 Nova Scotians living with Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia. Many Nova Scotians may encounter a person with early stage Alzheimer's disease and not even know it. That's why it is important to know the facts.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia. Alzheimer's disease is a progressive, degenerative disease of the brain. Symptoms include memory loss, difficulty with day-to-day tasks, and changes in mood and behaviour. People may think these symptoms are part of normal aging but they aren't. If you notice any of these symptoms or changes in abilities or behaviour, it is important to see a doctor. The changes may be due to other conditions such as depression, drug interactions, or an infection. If it does happen to be Alzheimer's disease, an early diagnosis helps you get the proper treatment, information, and support. While there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease, there are treatment options and lifestyle changes which can help slow the symptoms of the disease.

To know what warning signs to look out for, the Alzheimer Society has developed the following list:

1. Memory loss that affects day-to-day abilities

It's normal to occasionally forget appointments, colleagues' names or a friend's phone number and remember them later. A person

with Alzheimer's disease may forget things more often or have difficulty retaining new information.

2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks

Forgetting how to do something that you have been doing your whole life is a warning sign of dementia as well. A person with Alzheimer's disease may have trouble completing familiar tasks, such as preparing a meal or playing a game.

3. Problems with language

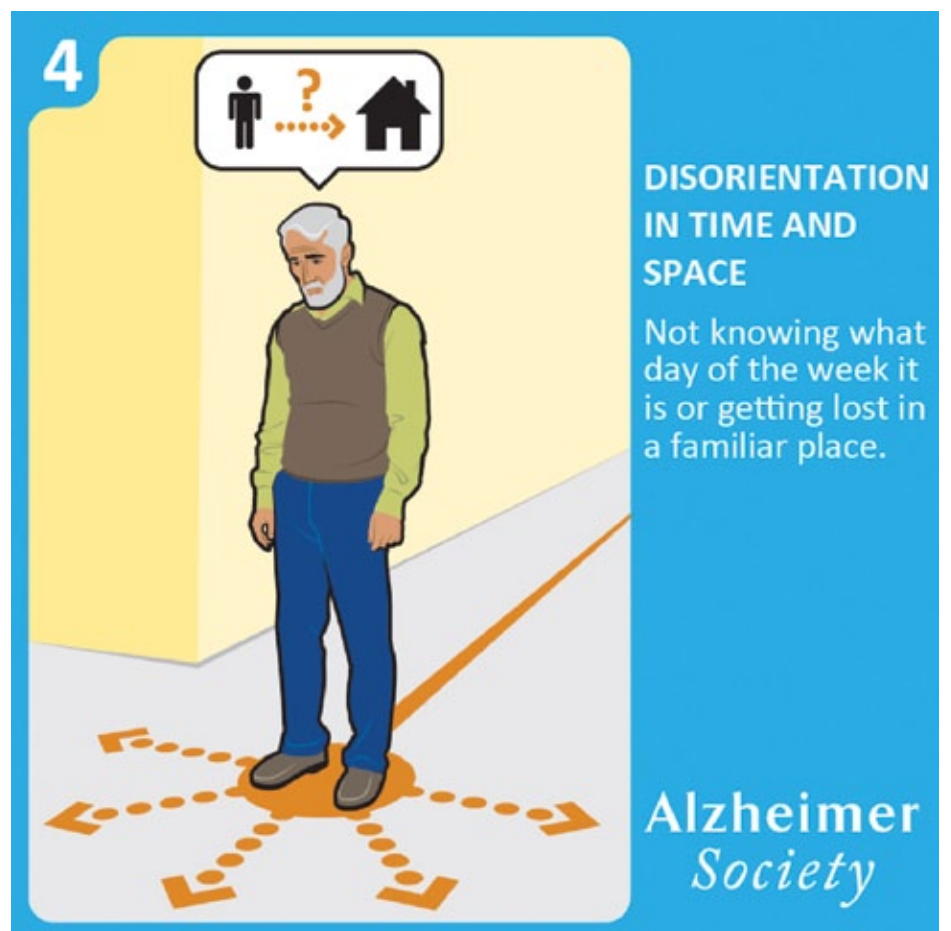
Everyone has trouble finding the right word sometimes, but a person with Alzheimer's disease may forget simple words or substitute words, making sentences difficult to understand.

4. Disorientation in time and space

It's normal to forget the day of the week or your destination - for a moment. But people with Alzheimer's disease can become lost on their own street, not knowing how they got there or how to get home.

5. Impaired judgment

From time to time people can make questionable decisions such as putting off seeing a doctor when they have an infection. A person with Alzheimer's disease may experience changes in judgment or decision-making, for example not



recognizing a medical problem that needs attention or wearing heavy clothing on a hot day.

6. Problems with abstract thinking

Occasionally people may have difficulty with tasks that require abstract thinking, such as balancing a chequebook. Someone with Alzheimer's disease may have significant difficulties with such tasks, for example not understanding what numbers are and how they are used.

7. Misplacing things

Anyone can temporarily misplace a wallet or keys. A person with Alzheimer's disease may put things in inappropriate places: an iron in the freezer or a wristwatch in the sugar bowl.

8. Changes in mood and behaviour

Everyone becomes sad or moody from time to time. Someone with Alzheimer's disease can exhibit varied mood swings - from calm to tears to anger - for no apparent reason.

9. Changes in personality

People's personalities can change in subtle ways over time. A person with Alzheimer's disease may experience more striking personality changes and can become confused, suspicious or withdrawn. Changes

may also include apathy, fearfulness or acting out of character.

10. Loss of initiative

At times, it's normal to tire of housework, business activities or social obligations, but most people regain their initiative. A person with Alzheimer's disease may become passive and apathetic and require cues and prompting to become involved.

The earlier these 10 signs are recognized and a diagnosis can be made, the more treatment options are available. Again, there is no cure for the disease, but there are many programs and services offered by the Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia, that when instituted early in the progression of the disease can actually help slow the symptoms. In some cases, this could mean an individual being able to live at home longer, versus someone who recognized the signs later or did not participate in programs.

The Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia is here to help both people living with dementia and their caregivers. We offer information, support, education, and referral.

For more information, call our confidential Alzheimer Information Line at **1-800-611-6345**, or visit us at www.alzheimer.ca/ns.

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