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Know the Signs of Dementia

June is Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month. Our brain is truly quite remarkable. It comprises 2% of our body weight and uses 20 to 30% of our energy or calories daily. It is the so-called control center for our bodies. So, when things go wrong, the impact on our health is considerable. May was stroke awareness month. In June, we look at the warning signs of dementia.

Dementia is a scary topic, and most of us have people in our lives who have experienced some dementia. Dementia is an umbrella term that covers many types of dementia; examples include Alzheimer's disease, frontal temporal dementia, Lewy body dementia, and vascular dementia, to name a few. Currently, there is no cure for dementia. However, it is imperative to recognize the early warning signs and seek treatment as soon as possible. At the same time, treatment for dementia will not cure the disease, it can help manage the symptoms. The Alzheimer's Association lists ten signs to look out for.

1. **Memory Loss that disrupts daily life** includes forgetting recently learned information. Memory loss could mean forgetting important dates and events, asking the same question repeatedly, or increasing reliance on memory aids or family members for things they used to handle on their own.
2. **Having challenges in planning or solving problems:** Some people may experience challenges following a familiar recipe or keeping track of monthly bills. They may experience difficulties concentrating and take much longer to do things than they did before.
3. **Difficulty completing familiar tasks:** They find it hard to complete daily tasks. A person may have trouble driving to a familiar location, organizing a grocery list, or remembering the rules of a favorite game.
4. **Confusion with time or place:** People with dementia can lose track of dates, seasons, and the passage of time. They may have trouble understanding something if it does not happen immediately, and they may forget how they got somewhere.
5. **Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships:** Some people may experience vision changes. This may lead to difficulties with balance or trouble reading. They may also have problems judging distance and determining color or contrast.
6. **New problems with words in speaking or writing:** They may have trouble following or joining a conversation, stop in the middle of a conversation and not know how to continue, or repeat themselves. They may struggle with vocabulary, naming a familiar object, or using the wrong name.
7. **Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps:** They may put things in unusual places. They lose things and are unable to retrace their steps. They might accuse others of stealing.
8. **Decreased or poor judgment:** People with dementia may experience a change in judgment or decision-making. For example, they may pay less attention to grooming or keeping themselves clean.
9. **Withdrawal from work or social activities:** They may experience changes in the ability to hold or follow a conversation, withdraw from hobbies, social activities, or other engagements.
10. **Changes in mood and personality:** They become confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful, or anxious. They can become easily upset at home, with friends, or outside their comfort zone.

People experiencing dementia may have one or more of these warning signs to different degrees. If you notice these signs in yourself or a loved one, please consult a healthcare professional immediately. There may be other causes for these signs besides dementia. It is best to check it out. Keep in mind that early detection has benefits.

References: Alzheimer's Association, K-State Research and Extension Publication MF3363