

Warning Signs: Does Your Aging Relative Need Help?

by Kathleen Donnelly for MSN Health & Fitness

- 1. Weight loss or weight gain.** In the U.S., where more than half of us could stand to drop a few pounds, we often see all weight loss as good weight loss. But if your parent is losing weight without trying, says Schempp, it could be a sign of [depression](#) or another illness. Weight gain, on the other hand, might mean your loved one is surviving on a diet of doughnuts—also not good.
- 2. Neglects personal grooming.** It's a hard problem to admit, but if your dad is wearing dirty clothes, has bad breath or body odor, or forgets to shave or brush his teeth or hair, he may need help, especially if he's always been fastidious.
- 3. A home that's not clean.** If your childhood memories of home include the ever-present aroma of pine cleaner, discovering dirt and clutter—especially in the bathroom and kitchen—is not normal.
- 4. Spoiled food in the refrigerator or insufficient food in the house.** It could be a sign that your loved one is growing forgetful or that she has lost her appetite.
- 5. Piles of unopened mail or unread newspapers.** Everyone gets behind in reading, but finding lots of unopened mail or stacks of untouched newspapers may signal forgetfulness or confusion.
- 6. Missed bill payments or changes in finances.** Does your dad need help handling the finances? Past-due notices are a sign that he may. Schempp suggests looking for a cancelled check so you can see if your loved one is still able to fill out a payment correctly.
- 7. Changes in judgment.** If your mom never used to give money to strangers, it's unusual that she's starting now. Pay attention to the decisions, financial and otherwise, that your family member makes.
- 8. Quits activities he or she once enjoyed.** Has your mother given up going to church? Did your father stop having lunch with his friends? Have they stopped watching their favorite TV shows? Take note if your parents give up activities they once enjoyed. It could be a sign of depression or other health problems.
- 9. Friends or neighbors notice a change.** Those who see your parents frequently can be good partners in their care, especially if you don't live nearby and can't visit often. If neighbors tell you your loved one is acting strangely, ask for details.
- 10. Unusual physical problems.** Do you see more burns or bruises? They may be signs of forgetfulness or possibly [problems with medication](#) or alcohol. It's also important to take note of chronic diseases, such as [high blood pressure](#) or [arthritis](#), that may affect your parents' ability to live independently. [Falling](#) is a sign of trouble, as is dizziness.
- 11. Can't manage daily tasks.** Can your parents bathe themselves, use the toilet, climb stairs? Can they drive safely or even call a cab?
- 12. Unable to get help.** Can your parents use the telephone to call for help? Do they keep a list of people they can call near the phone? Do they remember to dial 911 in an emergency? Can they hear the smoke alarm?