



News Column for Week of July 15, 2019

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Knowing When to Ask for Help Relating to Memory

Some people worry about becoming forgetful. Their concern is that it's the first sign of Alzheimer's disease.

We can see physical changes in our bodies as we age. However, the changes in the aging brain are not so obvious. We may not learn things as easily as we used to, or we may forget where we left our glasses. These are signs of mild forgetfulness, but are not necessarily signs of serious memory problems.

Emotional issues, such as stress, anxiety, or depression can promote forgetfulness that is sometimes confused with dementia. Trying to deal with significant life changes creates confusion and forgetfulness in some individuals. These challenges are usually temporary and fade as time passes. Short-term treatment may include counseling, medication, or both.

Health issues that may be treatable can contribute to some memory problems. Medication side effects, thyroid or kidney disorders, vitamin B-12 deficiency, and chronic alcoholism are a few examples. A doctor should be consulted to rule out any curable health related issues that could be causing forgetfulness before jumping to conclusions that dementia has set in.

It's best to start with your primary physician who knows your health history. The doctor's approach will likely be to conduct a thorough physical and mental health evaluation. A review of current prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, diet, and current general health will be taken into account. Taking a family member or close friend along will be helpful to gain additional information.

Dementia is the loss of thinking, memory, and reasoning skills to the extent that it affects a person's ability to carry out daily activities. While dementia is not a disease itself, it covers a group of symptoms that are caused by certain diseases such as Alzheimer's.

Symptoms of dementia can include: Being unable to remember things; repeating questions or stories over and over; becoming lost in familiar places; the inability to follow directions; confusion about time, people and places; neglecting personal safety, hygiene and nutrition.

People experiencing forgetfulness can use a variety of strategies to help maintain their memory and mental skills. Making to-do lists and using memory aids, such as notes and calendars, can be visual reminders of tasks to be done. Regular physical activity is good for the body, but has also been found to help provide better brain function. Limit alcohol use as heavy drinking over time can cause memory loss and permanent brain damage.

Being involved in hobbies and activities can help keep the brain engaged and exercised. Hobbies and other activities can also help relieve stress and feelings of anxiety or depression. Activities that require social interaction with others have also been found to stimulate the brain.

If you are concerned that you or someone you know has a serious memory problem, talk with your doctor. He or she may be able to diagnose the problem, or make a referral to healthcare professionals who offer treatment or services that might help.