

Memory Changes with Age: What's Normal and What's Not

Category : Alzheimers Disease/Dementia

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Dr. Griffin: Today's topic is about normal memory changes that we generally experience as we age and memory changer that are not a normal part of aging. What does normal memory change mean, Barb?

Barb: You know, Dr. Griffin, it's sometimes really hard to tell the differences between what's normal regarding memory changes with age and what may be the earliest signs of memory loss related to some form of dementia. Many people, especially those caregivers who have a parent or other family member diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, really worry when they notice their own memory slips " and wonder if they, too, have Alzheimer's. So, let me begin by saying that only a complete evaluation by a qualified physician can give you a better idea about what may be the cause of your memory loss.

However, some of the changes that we all pretty much experience as we age may be:

Walking out of a shopping mall and forgetting where you parked;

Finding your car at the mall but forgetting where you put your car keys;

Finding your keys in your jacket pocket, driving off and then remembering that you forgot to get your nephew's birthday card when you were at the mall!

So, as we age, we tend to forget more recent events or newly learned information, such as where we parked at the mall or that 5th item on our shopping list, but we do seem to remember past events or well-learned information quite well ' such as the day we bought our car or the day our nephew was born! Isolated instances of occasional forgetfulness seem part of the aging process.

Dr. G: So and how can we tell the difference between this type of change in memory and memory loss that we should be concerned about?

Barb: Changes in memory and thinking that you may want to watch seem related more to consistent and significant memory problems, such as:

TELLING OR ASKING THE SAME THINGS OVER AND OVER

NOT RECOLLECTING REQUESTS THEY HAVE MADE AND BECOMING FRUSTRATED WHEN THEY CAN'T

INABILITY TO DISCUSS CURRENT OR RECENT EVENTS

TROUBLE DOING DAILY TASKS (CHECKBOOK, REMEMBERING TO TAKE MEDICATIONS, TROUBLE WORKING MACHINES (LIKE THE CAR)

TROUBLE SOLVING PROBLEMS ON YOUR OWN

INCREASING DIFFICULTY FINDING THE WORDS YOU WANT OR STUMBLING IN CONVERSATION A LOT

CONSISTENTLY FORGETTING THE DATE OR DAY

BEING EASILY FRUSTRATED IN NEW SITUATIONS

NOT RECOGNIZING PEOPLE WHO SHOULD BE FAMILIAR..

Again, there's an important difference between forgetting where we parked our car and forgetting that we have a car - this type of memory impairment should be evaluated!

Dr. G: What type of an evaluation should a person receive who is concerned about their own memory loss or a loved one's problems with memory and thinking?

Barb: Especially for older adults, a geriatric internist may better assess the changes related to aging and either do a thorough exam themselves or refer to a clinic that specializes in this type of evaluation. The Memory Clinic at UT Southwestern is one such clinic where folks can receive a thorough evaluation, that may include lab work, an MRI or CT scan, neurological/psychiatric exam, neuropsychological testing, and more. Their number is 214-648-7444. Although memory loss can accompany the aging process to some extent, the type and extent of memory loss should be considered and evaluated if appropriate.

Dr. G: I know our listeners can call ElderHope or link to your website for more information â€“ where can they reach you, Barb?

Barb: 972-768-8553 and www.elderhope.com