

When Home Care Can Help

A Simple At-home Assessment
for Families



Sometimes people don't want to admit that they need help to stay at home, and others may be unaware that it is time for some extra help to maintain a safe home environment. Knowing and watching for signs that could indicate extra assistance is needed often falls on untrained family, friends or advisors.

1. EATING HABITS

- YES NO *Has there been a change in eating habits?*
YES NO *Is there unexplained weight loss?*
YES NO *Is there food in the home?*
YES NO *Is the person able to go to the grocery store?*

Losing weight without trying could be a sign that something is wrong.

For the elderly, weight loss could be related to many factors.

Difficulty cooking. The person may be having difficulty finding the energy to cook, grasping the tools necessary to cook, reading food label directions or getting groceries into the home.

Loss of taste or smell. Some loss of taste and smell is natural with aging, especially after age 60. In other cases, illness or medication contributes to loss of taste or smell. The person might not be interested in eating if food doesn't taste or smell as good as it once did.

Underlying conditions. Sometimes weight loss is a sign of a more serious underlying

condition, such as malnutrition, dementia, depression or cancer.

2. HYGIENE

- YES NO *Are hygiene and dress taken care of?*
YES NO *Are his or her clothes clean?*
YES NO *Is self-care evident?*

Failure to keep up with daily routines, such as bathing, brushing teeth and other basic grooming, could indicate health problem such as dementia, depression, or physical impairments.



3. CARE OF HOME

- YES NO *Is the home in good order?*
YES NO *Are the lights working?*
YES NO *Is the heat/air conditioning on?*
YES NO *Are the bathrooms clean?*
YES NO *Is the yard overgrown?*
YES NO *Is clutter blocking walkways throughout the house?*

NOTEWORTHY: Any big changes in the way things are done around the house could provide clues to health. For example, scorched pots could mean forgetting about food cooking on the stove. Neglected housework could be a sign of depression, dementia or other problems.

4. SAFETY/MENTAL ATTITUDE

- YES NO *Is the senior safe in his/her home?*
YES NO *Have there been any recent falls?*
YES NO *Is he/she able to read medicine labels?*
YES NO *Is the older person in good spirits?*
YES NO *Does he/she get unusually fatigued?*
YES NO *Is he/she spending time with friends?*
YES NO *Does he/she enjoy hobbies and activities?*
YES NO *Is he/she involved in clubs or attend church?*
YES NO *Have friends/neighbors expressed concern?*
YES NO *Have you noticed problems such as burns, injuries, weakness, forgetfulness or possible misuse of prescribed medications?*

A drastic change in mood or outlook could be a sign of depression or other health concerns.

5. MOBILITY

- YES NO *Does he/she have difficulty getting around?*
YES NO *Is there any problem or reluctance to walk?*
YES NO *Is joint arthritis making walking difficult?*
YES NO *Would he/she benefit from a cane or walker?*

NOTEWORTHY: Muscle weakness, joint problems and other age-related changes can make it difficult to move around. If the person is unsteady walking, he/she may be at risk of falling — a primary cause of disability among older adults.

6. BEHAVIOR

- YES NO *Is the person forgetful or exhibiting inappropriate behavior?*
YES NO *Does he/she seem paranoid or agitated?*
YES NO *Is he/she unusually loud or quiet?*
YES NO *Is he/she making phone calls at all hours?*
YES NO *Are there piles of unopened mail/newspapers?*



- YES NO *Are prescriptions going unfilled?*
YES NO *Are appointments being missed?*
YES NO *Is he/she mishandling finances?*
YES NO *Have unusual purchases been made?*
YES NO *Are multiple medications from multiple doctors being taken?*

NOTEWORTHY: Sometimes doctors may be unaware of medications prescribed by other physicians. Decline in functioning may be due to medication reactions or interactions. Consider having multiple prescriptions evaluated by a medical doctor skilled in polypharmacy (the knowledge of how various medications interact).

If any of these signs are noted and raise concerns, bring them to the attention of the person's physician and consider additional care in the home.

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