

Wise Notes for Consumers

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Memory and Thinking: What's Normal and What's Not?

Whether you're getting older or someone you love is aging, it's common to worry about memory and thinking abilities. But what's the difference between mild forgetfulness, which is often a normal part of aging, and a more serious memory problem? The National Institute on Aging provided information to help us learn the basics. Plus, find out when it's time to see a doctor to determine whether you are experiencing memory or thinking problems and what may be causing them.

What's normal and what's not? The difference between normal, age-related forgetfulness and a serious memory problem is that memory problems make it hard to do everyday things, like driving or shopping. Here are common signs you or someone you love has a problem:

- Asking the same questions over and over again
- Getting lost in familiar places
- Not being able to follow instructions
- Becoming confused about time, people, and places

What counts as normal forgetfulness? Many people become more forgetful as they age. Here are some typical examples of mild forgetfulness:

- Missing a monthly payment
- Forgetting which day it is and remembering later

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national orientation. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.

- Sometimes forgetting which word to use
- Losing things from time to time

Some forgetfulness is a normal part of aging, but don't ignore changes in your memory or thinking that concern you. Talk with your doctor if you're having more serious memory problems than normal

When is it time to see a doctor? If you, a family member, or friend has problems remembering recent events or thinking clearly, talk with a doctor. They may suggest a thorough checkup to see what might be causing the symptoms. Memory and other thinking problems have many possible causes, including depression, an infection, or a medication side effect. Sometimes, the problem can be treated, and the thinking problems disappear. Other times, the problem cannot be reversed. Finding the cause of the problems is important to determine the best course of action.

What should I know about unproven treatments? Some people are tempted by untried or unproven "cures" that claim to make the brain sharper or prevent dementia. Check with your doctor before trying pills, supplements, or other products that promise to improve memory or prevent brain disorders. These "treatments" might be unsafe, a waste of money, or both.

Contact the Wise County Extension office at (940) 627-3341 for additional resources on healthy aging.

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