



ASSESSING COGNITIVE ABILITY

A Place for Mom Advisor and Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Wes Ashford, MD, PhD, provides insight into how to make visits home a prime time to evaluate senior loved ones' cognitive abilities, do screening and discuss options for the future.

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

Dr. Ashford offers these indicators that your loved one may be suffering from cognitive impairment:

1. Difficulty doing the more familiar things in their life.
2. Difficulty remembering things that happened in the last day.
3. Sudden behavioral changes. Depression, quietness, agitation or acting out.
4. Having trouble keeping a conversation.
 - Asking the same questions repeatedly, without remembering the answer
 - Not referring to people by names
 - Vagueness and lack of details in the conversation

TEST AND OBSERVE

A test called MemTrax is an online memory test and fun game that helps measure memory, which can be useful for families to determine if their loved one is suffering from a cognitive problem. While mild forgetfulness affects most people as they age, serious memory problems affect people's ability to conduct everyday activities.

Dr. Ashford also recommends observing their activities of daily living:

- Walking and getting around
- Dressing
- Bathing
- Using the toilet
- Grooming
- Feeding

ACTIVITIES TO ENGAGE YOUR AGING PARENTS

Dr. Ashford stresses that, regardless of cognitive decline, the two most important things to continue doing as we get older are:

1. Exercise
2. Cognitive Engagement

In other words, 'walking and talking.' Keep your parents physically active by walking with them, and engage with them in conversation. These are the simple keys to emotional and physical health.

"Help your loved one prepare for their future, proactively. Be helpful and supportive, and let them participate in decision-making, if possible. If needed, get educated. I highly recommend 'The 36-Hour Day,' by Nancy L. Mace. The Alzheimer's Association also has great information, and provides local support groups. And it's never a bad idea to seek an expert's help, whether that's a family doctor, geriatrician, psychologist or elder care attorney." - Dr. Wes Ashford