

# AgingCare

## How to Know When Your Elderly Parents Need Help at Home and When to Intervene

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Admitting the need for assistance — and accepting it — isn't easy for people as they age. So, how will you know when your aging parent needs help at home? One thing is certain: Mom and Dad aren't likely to be the ones who tell you.

Seniors have a strong desire to remain independent and retain control of their own lives for as long as possible. Typically, an older adult will downplay or hide any issues they've been experiencing until an accident or sudden decline in their health makes it plain that they need assistance. Since adult children are often unable to participate in making care decisions before a crisis takes place, the added stress of an unexpected hospitalization or fall complicates things even further.

Want to avoid being caught off guard? Start regularly monitoring your parent's physical and mental abilities (ideally in person), encouraging proper legal and financial planning, and researching long-term care options. These steps will ensure you're prepared should your loved one begin to show signs of needing help.

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## Signs your elderly parent needs help

Look for these common indicators that an older adult may need help at home or an increased level of care.

### Difficulty performing activities of daily living

- [Bathing \(/articles/elderly-parents-who-wont-shower-or-change-clothes-133877.htm\)](/articles/elderly-parents-who-wont-shower-or-change-clothes-133877.htm) and grooming
- Dressing
- Toileting
- Continence
- Walking and transferring (e.g., moving from the bed to a chair)
- Eating and drinking

**Read:** [Understanding Activities of Daily Living: Checklists, Assessments, and More \(/articles/activities-of-daily-living-why-this-measure-matters-186853.htm\)](/articles/activities-of-daily-living-why-this-measure-matters-186853.htm)

### Changes in physical function and appearance

- Noticeable weight loss due to poor diet, and/or difficulty cooking, eating, shopping for food, etc.
- Wearing soiled clothing or dressing inappropriately for the season/weather due to difficulties dressing
- Poor personal hygiene and unpleasant body odor as a result of infrequent showering or bathing
- Unkempt hair, untrimmed nails, or poor oral hygiene, indicating a noticeable decline in grooming habits and personal care
- Bruises, wounds, or other marks on the body that could indicate falls or changes in mobility
- Noticeable burns on the skin that could indicate a senior is experiencing problems cooking

### Changes in behavior and mental status

- Lack of drive or motivation
- Loss of interest in hobbies and activities
- Difficulty keeping track of time
- Failure to return phone calls to friends and family members
- Changes in mood or extreme mood swings
- Increased agitation
- Verbally or physically abusive behaviors
- Changes in sleep patterns (e.g., insomnia or sleeping more than usual)

### Neglecting household responsibilities

- Inability to independently complete [instrumental activities of daily living \(IADLs\) \(/articles/instrumental-activities-of-daily-living-defined-427370.htm\)](/articles/instrumental-activities-of-daily-living-defined-427370.htm)
- Changes in household cleanliness and organization
- Extreme clutter or evidence of hoarding
- Stacks of unopened mail, late payment notices, or bounced checks
- Unpaid bills, calls from collectors, or utilities being turned off
- Spoiled food that doesn't get thrown away
- Little or no fresh, healthy food or overall low food supply
- Stained or wet furniture or carpet

Using color in the home, which may indicate incontinence

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- Failure to maintain outdoor areas with landscaping, snow removal, or garbage collection
- Signs of unsafe driving (e.g., new dents or scratches on their car)
- Unfilled prescriptions

### Changes in cognition, memory, and judgment

- Forgetfulness (e.g., forgetting to take medications or taking incorrect dosages, missing appointments, misplacing items)
- Increased confusion
- Loss of reasoning skills
- Consistent use of poor judgment (e.g., falling for scams or sales pitches, giving away money)
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks
- Frequently getting lost when walking or driving
- Repetitive speech patterns
- Inability to complete sentences
- Impaired word-finding ability
- Changes in personality or behavior
- Poor personal hygiene and/or wearing the same clothes over and over
- Inability to recall names of familiar people, objects, or places

**Read:** [Early Signs of Dementia: When To Be Concerned \(/articles/alzheimers-disease-dementia-warning-signs-144253.htm\)](/articles/alzheimers-disease-dementia-warning-signs-144253.htm)

Take the AgingCare Needs Assessment

## When to intervene with aging parents

So, you know the signs to look out for, but how do you really know when the right time is to intervene and seek help?

"Caregiving is on a spectrum, so the solution must match the need," a member of AgingCare's [Caregiver Forum \(/Caregiver-Forum\)](/Caregiver-Forum) wrote. "Maybe it's twice-weekly housekeeping, 24/7 skilled nursing care, or something in between. At any rate, if your gut is telling you something isn't right, something is really not right. Always listen to your gut."

The truth is, making the decision to hire help for an aging loved one looks different for everyone. You just have to trust your instincts. If you're feeling burned out or are concerned you or your loved one's health or safety could be in jeopardy, it's probably time to seek help.

### Handling aging parents who refuse help

On the topic of encouraging your parent to accept help, another forum member shared these thoughts:

"Many elders are in denial that they need help. This is common. Who among us would ever want to admit we need help, especially after being independent for so many years? No one wants to have to impose on anyone else."

One reaction that seniors exhibit to cover the truth of the matter is pushing away those that try to help the most, especially if they have dementia, which was the case in my own father's situation. But sometimes we must force our help on them because it is for their own safety and well-being.

I had to do this with my dad, and I do not regret it for a minute. In the long run, shortly before he died, he finally accepted that I loved him and would do anything to help him and to keep him safe.

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## Hiring home care for aging parents

If you believe your mom and dad are exhibiting any warning signs, speak with them about their changing abilities and care needs. It's best to [discuss the future with aging parents \(/articles/talk-about-future-with-senior-174484.htm\)](/articles/talk-about-future-with-senior-174484.htm) sooner rather than later to ensure everyone is on the same page and avoid surprises. Broach the subject respectfully and in such a way that they're able to participate in identifying the underlying problem(s) and coming up with solutions.

Keep in mind that these red flags don't necessarily mean a move to assisted living or a nursing home is warranted. However, their presence does indicate that some sort of daily supportive care is needed. For many families, hiring home help allows older adults to stay in the comfort of their own houses for as long as safely possible. A [Care Advisor \(https://www.agingcare.com/local\)](https://www.agingcare.com/local) can help you find the right agency in your area and discuss other care options for your loved one.

**Read:** [How to Choose a Home Care Agency \(/articles/how-to-select-a-home-care-company-230598.htm\)](/articles/how-to-select-a-home-care-company-230598.htm)

## Finding caregiver support

Consider joining the conversation and find more caregiving advice by creating an account on AgingCare's [Caregiver Forum \(/Caregiver-Forum\)](/Caregiver-Forum). Whether you're struggling with care decisions or simply looking for tips from people who have been in your shoes, our online forum offers a safe space for caregivers across the nation to communicate. By becoming a member, you'll have the ability to ask questions about your situation, share advice, tell stories, and vent whenever you need to. Forum members span a range of experience levels, so you can learn something new with each unique interaction.

### Source:

Memory, Forgetfulness, and Aging: What's Normal and What's Not? (<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/memory-forgetfulness-and-aging-whats-normal-and-whats-not>) (<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/memory-forgetfulness-and-aging-whats-normal-and-whats-not>)

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[Aging in Place\(/topics/2/aging-in-place\)](/topics/2/aging-in-place)

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[Instrumental ADLs\(/topics/89/instrumental-adls\)](/topics/89/instrumental-adls)

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## Related Articles

1. [Caring for Your Parent: An Action Plan for Adult Children \(/articles/action-plan-for-adult-children-176235.htm\)](/articles/action-plan-for-adult-children-176235.htm)
2. [5 Tips for Helping Aging Parents Without Taking Over \(/articles/how-to-help-aging-parents-149102.htm\)](/articles/how-to-help-aging-parents-149102.htm)
3. [Coping With Seniors Who Won't Accept In-Home Caregivers \(/articles/when-elders-don-t-accept-outside-caregivers-in-the-home-135237.htm\)](/articles/when-elders-don-t-accept-outside-caregivers-in-the-home-135237.htm)

## Recent Questions

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[supplies-needed-for-home-care-such-as-diapers-dep-483195.htm](#))

- Q. An extremely low percentage of people I've spoken with in LBD support groups use assisted living or comparable variations. Normal? ([/questions/an-extremely-low-percentage-of-people-ive-spoken-with-in-lbd-support-groups-use-assisted-living-or-c-483256.htm](#))
- Q. Do you know what are the choices of Rollator Walker? What distinguishes each of them? ([/questions/do-you-know-what-are-the-choices-of-rollator-walker-what-distinguishes-each-of-them-483363.htm](#))

## Popular Questions

- Q. How do you deal with being a family caregiver? ([/questions/how-you-deal-with-being-family-caregiver-212801.htm](#))
- Q. Caregiver asked for my WiFi password. Why would she ask if she is watching my parents and isn't this a security concern? ([/questions/caregiver-asked-for-my-wifi-password-why-would-she-ask-if-she-is-watching-my-parents-and-is-this-sec-439231.htm](#))
- Q. Starting chemo tomorrow---need all your support! ([/questions/starting-chemo-tomorrow-need-all-your-support-450156.htm](#))

## Related Questions

- Q. How do I deal with my mother, who just returned home from rehab after suffering from a broken hip? ([/questions/dealing-with-elder-coming-back-from-rehab-for-broken-hip-138704.htm](#))
- Q. I hired a new caregiver for my mother and she is already looking for things about the caregiver that she doesn't like. The caregiver is good, so what do I do now? ([/questions/my-mother-does-not-like-the-caregiver-that-i-hired-138727.htm](#))
- Q. If I am a dementia-stricken neighbor's medical & durable POA, can I insist homecare providers see her? ([/questions/poa-insisting-an-elder-with-dementia-gets-home-care-138953.htm](#))
- Q. Can you have Hospice Services and home health at the same time? ([/questions/can-you-have-hospice-services-and-home-health-at-the-same-time-138961.htm](#))

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## ELDER CARE RESOURCES

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[Senior Care Guides \(/ebooks\)](/ebooks)

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