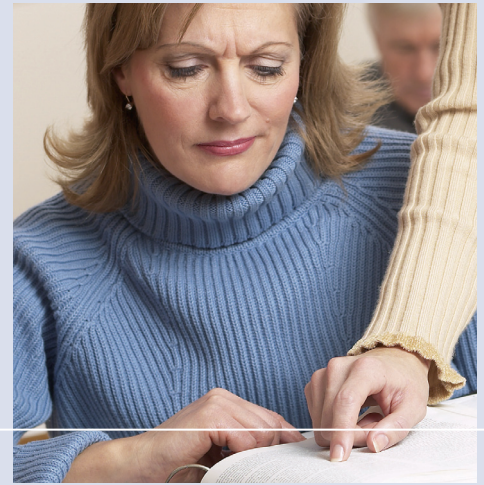
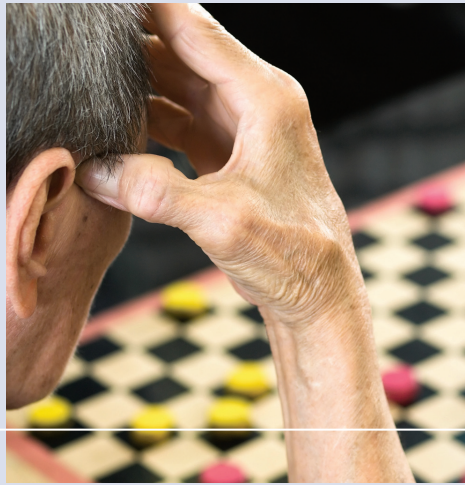
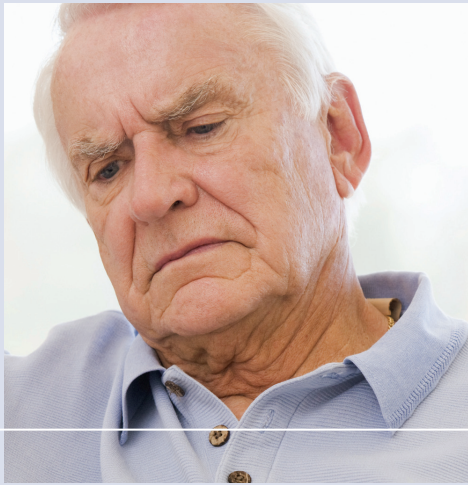


TIPS



for Recognizing Early Dementia

It is normal for people without dementia to forget parts of an experience and then remember it later; they also have the ability to follow written or spoken directions, use notes as reminders, and care for themselves. On the other hand, those with dementia do not have these abilities; they forget entire experiences and rarely remember them later on.

Early diagnosis is an important part of helping persons with dementia and their families receive the support, care, and information that will be most effective. The following are possible signs of dementia:

- Memory loss, especially of recently learned information; occasional name-forgetting and appointment-missing are normal.
- Task-performance difficulty (eg, steps necessary for planning a meal, making a telephone call, or playing checkers may be forgotten).
- Language difficulties and word retrieval (eg, “Where’s that thing for my teeth?” rather than “I can’t find my toothbrush”).
- Space or time disorientation, such as getting lost in one’s own neighborhood.
- Poor judgment (eg, giving large sums of money to telemarketers).
- Problems with abstract thinking; complex mental tasks, such as balancing a checkbook, may become difficult.
- Misplacing things (eg, putting keys in the refrigerator).
- Personality changes, including the development of suspiciousness, confusion, or fear.
- Rapid mood changes, such as from anger to tearfulness.
- Loss of initiative (eg, spending hours in front of the TV).

This page is part of an ongoing series of practical tips for patients with neurologic disorders. This month’s contribution is from Michael Sperber, MD, a psychiatrist at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts. If you have compiled clinically relevant tips that you wish to share, please contact the editor at Neurology Reviews, 7 Century Drive, Suite 302, Parsippany, NJ 07054.