

## Recognizing the Signs of Dementia

As the holiday season begins, many adult children are making plans to visit parents or older relatives living in another town or perhaps, another state. Spending time with aging loved ones gives you the opportunity to check their health. Moments of absentmindedness and occasional forgetfulness are common, however, there are some things to look for if you suspect your parent or relative may have dementia.

We spoke with VMRC's director of assisted living, Kristin Trask. Kristin is a Dementia Friends Champion through LeadingAge Virginia, an association of providers in aging services. Dementia Friends Champions complete a training program that equips them to facilitate information sessions with friends, family and co-workers to help community members understand dementia and the small things that can be done to make a difference for those living with dementia.

### What early warning signs might indicate a person has dementia?

**Kristin:** Some of the typical signs you may see for a person living with the early stages of Dementia include:

- Difficulty doing familiar tasks such as managing money, medications, or driving
- Problems with word-finding, misnaming or misunderstanding
- Misplacing things or putting them in "odd places"
- Changes in mood or behavior, or change in typical personality
- Difficulty problem solving or reasoning
- Worsening judgment, unable to think things through like before
- Withdrawing from normal patterns of activities and interests
- Memory Loss for recent or new information- Repeats self frequently

### How can someone share concerns with a parent or loved one?

**Kristin:** There is no preferred way to address these concerns. Likely, they are already aware that something is different. You know your loved one the best so if talking about it seems to add additional stress, give them some time and try talking about it again later.

### What are the next steps?

**Kristin:** The first step is to make an appointment with the primary care physician. If your parent or loved one will allow it, it is important to go to the appointment with them. If you live far away, it's a good idea to set up a support system for your loved one. Have a friend or neighbor check in with them frequently. Make things easier for your loved one by doing things like setting up medications in a daily pill container. If more help is needed, consider using a personal care agency or home health aide.

### Could it be a sign of something else?

**Kristin:** Numerous conditions including reactions to medications, nutritional deficiencies, infections and immune disorders can cause dementia-like symptoms. If you suspect your parent may have dementia, it's important to visit a physician and determine whether the signs are dementia or another health-related concern.