



The Warning Sign That Isn't Forgetting

Specialists say the first signs of dementia often appear in personality and behaviour, not in a failing memory.

For years, the public has been taught to watch for one warning sign of dementia above all others: memory loss. The image is familiar. An older person forgets a name, misplaces their keys, or repeats the same question. Yet a growing number of specialists argue that this focus on forgetfulness is misleading, and that some of the earliest changes appear somewhere else entirely.

Doctors increasingly suspect¹ that shifts in behaviour and personality can arrive long before serious memory problems begin. A person who was once warm and patient may become irritable for no clear reason. Someone who loved company may quietly start to withdraw² from friends and stop answering the phone. These changes are easy to explain away. Families often blame stress, tiredness, or simply growing older.

The difficulty is that such signs are not dramatic. There is no single moment of confusion³ that makes everyone stop and worry. Instead, the changes are slow and quiet, and they can be severely⁴ underestimated for months or even years. By the time memory loss becomes obvious, the underlying condition may already be well advanced.

One form of dementia makes this pattern especially clear. Frontotemporal dementia affects the front part of the brain, the area that controls judgement, emotion, and social behaviour. People with this disorder⁵ often keep their memory intact in the early stages. What changes first is how they act. They may say rude things in public, make poor financial choices, or lose interest in the people and hobbies they once cared about. Because their memory still works,

doctors sometimes miss the real cause and treat them for depression instead.

Researchers have found other early clues too. Some people lose their sense of smell. Others struggle with planning a simple meal or following a familiar route home. A few develop sudden problems with money or numbers. None of these difficulties looks like classic forgetfulness, which is exactly why they are so often overlooked.

Why does this matter so much? The answer lies in timing. There is still no cure for most forms of dementia, but early support can make a significant⁶ difference to a person's daily life. Families who understand what is happening can plan ahead, arrange help, and avoid painful misunderstandings. Patients can take part in research and treatment while they are still able to make their own choices.

Some experts now urge people to think about dementia in a broader way. Instead of asking only whether an older relative is becoming forgetful, they suggest asking whether the person has changed. Have they become colder, quieter, or strangely careless? Do they seem like a different version of themselves?

This shift in thinking does not mean that every change of mood is a warning of disease. Most people who become a little forgetful or short-tempered are perfectly healthy. The message is gentler than that. When we widen our attention beyond memory alone, we give doctors a better chance to act early, and we give families more time to understand, prepare, and support the people they love.

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VOCABULARY — KEY WORDS FROM THE STORY

#	WORD	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
1	suspect <i>verb</i>	to think that something is probably true, especially something bad, even without full proof.	"Police suspect that the fire was started on purpose."
2	withdraw <i>verb</i>	to stop taking part in social life and become quiet and distant from other people.	"After losing his job, he began to withdraw from his old friends."
3	confusion <i>noun</i>	a state of not being able to think clearly or understand what is happening.	"There was a lot of confusion about which train to take."
4	severely <i>adverb</i>	to a very great and serious degree.	"The roads were severely damaged by the flood."
5	disorder <i>noun</i>	an illness or medical condition that stops part of the body or mind from working normally.	"She was diagnosed with a sleep disorder last year."
6	significant <i>adjective</i>	large or important enough to have a real effect or to be noticed.	"The new policy led to a significant rise in sales."

COMPREHENSION — ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1 — MULTIPLE CHOICE

What is the main argument the article makes about the early signs of dementia?

- A-) Memory loss is the only reliable sign of dementia.
- B-) Changes in behaviour and personality may appear before serious memory loss.
- C-) Dementia can be completely cured if it is found early.
- D-) Forgetfulness in older people is always a sign of disease.

QUESTION 2 — MULTIPLE CHOICE

Why does the article say frontotemporal dementia is often missed by doctors in its early stages?

- A-) Because patients refuse to visit a doctor.
- B-) Because the patient's memory still works, so the cause is mistaken for depression.
- C-) Because it only affects the back of the brain.
- D-) Because the symptoms appear suddenly and are very dramatic.

QUESTION 3 — SHORT ANSWER

Using your own words, explain why finding dementia early can be valuable even though there is no cure for most forms of it.

COMPREHENSION ANSWERS

My score today ___ / 3

Q1 Changes in behaviour and personality may appear before serious memory loss. ✓ Correct (B)

The opening and second paragraphs state that the focus on forgetfulness is 'misleading' and that doctors 'suspect that shifts in behaviour and personality can arrive long before serious memory problems begin'. The other options are directly contradicted: the article says there is 'no cure', warns against assuming forgetfulness means disease, and presents memory loss as just one possible sign.

Q2 Because the patient's memory still works, so the cause is mistaken for depression. ✓ Correct (B)

The fourth paragraph explains that people with this disorder 'often keep their memory intact in the early stages' and that 'because their memory still works, doctors sometimes miss the real cause and treat them for depression instead'. This directly links intact memory to misdiagnosis.

Q3 **Answer:** Even without a cure, an early diagnosis gives both patients and families time to act while the person can still make decisions. Families can plan ahead, organise practical help, and avoid blaming the person for changes they cannot control. The patient can join research or treatment programmes and express their own wishes about the future. Early knowledge therefore improves daily life and reduces painful misunderstandings, which is a real benefit separate from finding a cure.

Explanation: A strong answer should make clear that the value of early detection is about time, planning, and quality of life rather than cure. Look for references to the text's points: support making 'a significant difference', families being able to 'plan ahead', and patients taking part in research 'while they are still able to make their own choices'. The student should paraphrase rather than copy and should connect at least two specific benefits.

VOCABULARY — TRANSLATION & NOTES

suspect

Often followed by 'that' + a clause: 'Doctors suspect that...'. The verb is stressed on the second syllable (suSPECT), unlike the noun (SUSpect).

withdraw

Commonly used as 'withdraw from' something or someone. It is irregular: withdraw, withdrew, withdrawn.

confusion

An uncountable noun. Common phrases include 'a state of confusion' and 'cause confusion'. The related adjective is 'confused'.

severely

Often pairs with words like 'damaged', 'affected', 'limited', or 'underestimated'. It comes from the adjective 'severe'.

disorder

Frequently used with a body or mind word in front: 'eating disorder', 'mental disorder'. As a noun it can also mean a lack of order or organisation.

significant

Common collocations: 'a significant difference', 'a significant change', 'a significant amount'. The adverb form is 'significantly'.

YOUR TURN — SENTENCE BUILDING

Mastery comes from practice. Write original sentences using today's target vocabulary.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

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