



10 Early Signs of Dementia: What to Look For (and When to Pause)

Noticing changes in someone you love can feel unsettling. Often, the earliest signs of dementia appear quietly and gradually—easy to dismiss as stress, ageing, or “just a bad day.” This article is not about diagnosis, but about awareness. Recognising patterns early can help you seek support sooner and respond with greater understanding and patience.

1. Increasing Forgetfulness

One of the most common early signs is difficulty remembering recent events. Someone may forget conversations, appointments, or what they did the day before, even though long-term memories remain intact. This goes beyond occasional forgetfulness and begins to affect daily life

2. Difficulty with Everyday Tasks

Tasks that were once automatic—like cooking a familiar meal, managing finances, or using household appliances—can become confusing. Planning steps in the correct order may feel overwhelming and lead to frustration or withdrawal

3. Language and Communication Changes

Early dementia can affect how someone communicates. They may struggle to find the right words, lose track mid-sentence, repeat questions, or find it hard to follow conversations. Concentration during discussions often decreases

4. Disorientation in Time or Place

A reduced sense of time and space is another common sign. Someone may forget the day, season, or where they are—even in familiar environments. Getting lost or feeling confused about how they arrived somewhere can be deeply distressing for them

5. Changes in Mood or Personality

You may notice shifts in mood that seem out of character: increased anxiety, suspicion, irritability, depression, or sudden mood swings. Personality changes can occur, and behaviours that are unfamiliar or uncharacteristic may appear

6. Misplacing Items in Unusual Places

It's common for items to be placed in strange locations—keys in the fridge, a wallet in the oven—followed by no memory of how they got there. This pattern differs from occasionally misplacing things and can be a clear early indicator

7. Changes in Judgment or Decision-Making

Poor judgment may show up as inappropriate clothing for the weather, unsafe choices, or uncharacteristic spending habits. Assessing situations and making practical decisions can become increasingly difficult

8. Restlessness or Nervous Energy

Some people experience increased restlessness—pacing, tapping, or appearing as though they're waiting for something with no clear reason. This can also affect sleep and may be more noticeable if the person was already mildly restless before

9. Withdrawal from Activities and Social Life

A loss of interest in hobbies, work, or social activities once enjoyed can be an early warning sign. This may include withdrawing from friends, routines, or community involvement

10. Visual and Spatial Difficulties

In some types of dementia, including Alzheimer's and Lewy Body dementia, the brain struggles to process visual information. This can affect reading, judging distance, recognising faces, or navigating familiar surroundings

A Gentle Reminder

Seeing one or two of these signs does not automatically mean dementia. What matters most is noticing patterns over time. If concerns persist, a GP or specialist can help guide next steps.

At **The Memory Nest**, we focus on helping you understand *why* certain behaviours may be happening—so you can respond with compassion rather than fear, and support your loved one while also caring for yourself.

You are not meant to carry this alone. And you are allowed to seek clarity, support, and steadiness along the way.

My observations and actions on our journey:

When I first noticed changes in my husband, I was deeply concerned, yet the medical profession, along with family and friends, felt I was reading too much into things. Rather than dismissing what I was sensing, I began quietly documenting what I was observing—over two months, I wrote down the changes and concerning behaviours in simple chronological order. Before our next appointment, I emailed this list to our GP and neurologist and shared that I felt like a terrible wife raising these concerns in front of my husband, because at that stage he still understood what was being discussed. I asked them to read it beforehand so they could truly understand where I was coming from and help guide the next steps—testing, planning, and clarity. I had imagined that receiving a dementia diagnosis would be devastating, but in an unexpected way, it brought relief. We finally knew what we were dealing with, and instead of uncertainty and doubt, we had a direction forward.

If you're noticing changes...If something in your body is quietly telling you that things

feel different, it's okay to trust that awareness. You don't need to have the right words, proof, or a diagnosis yet. Noticing patterns over time, writing things down, and seeking clarity is not being dramatic or disloyal—it's an act of care. You are allowed to ask questions, to advocate gently, and to look for understanding at a pace that feels right for you. And whatever the outcome, having clarity can offer steadiness, direction, and a place to stand rather than staying lost in uncertainty.

This space offers guidance and resources to support carers and is designed to complement — not replace — professional care and personal support networks, through my lived experiences and acquired knowledge during my journey.