

WARNING SIGNS CHECKLIST



Is an Older Adult Struggling to Live Independently?

Important Note: Please use this checklist to observe patterns over time. No single sign proves someone can no longer live independently. Look for clusters of changes and seek a medical evaluation or professional advice before making major decisions.



PERSONAL CARE & HYGIENE

- Decline in grooming
- Difficulty bathing or dressing
- Signs of unmanaged incontinence
- Wearing soiled clothing or clothing with strong odors
- Difficulty managing hearing aids, glasses, or dentures
- Weight loss suggesting skipped meals



MANAGING THE HOUSEHOLD

- Home dirtier or more cluttered than usual
- Unopened mail or unpaid bills
- Laundry, dishes, or trash piling up
- Broken items left unrepaired
- Difficulty with routine chores



PETS & ANIMALS

- Pet appears unkempt
- Empty food or water bowls
- Litter boxes/cages not cleaned
- Missed veterinary appointments
- Difficulty exercising the pet
- Forgetting to feed or medicate the pet
- Expresses worry about who will care for the pet



NUTRITION & FOOD

- Little or no fresh food in the house
- Spoiled or expired food in the fridge
- Evidence of skipped meals or relying only on snacks
- Trouble cooking or using kitchen appliances safely
- Unexplained weight loss or gain



MEMORY & THINKING

- Repeating the same questions or stories in a short span
- Forgetting appointments, names, or recent conversations
- Getting confused about time, date, or place
- Getting lost in familiar places
- Poor judgment or making unusual decisions



MEDICATION MANAGEMENT

- Pills left uncounted, mixed up, or clearly missed
- Expired medications still in use
- Confusion about what to take and when
- Taking too much or too little of a prescription
- Not refilling important prescriptions



MOBILITY & PHYSICAL SAFETY

- Difficulty walking, standing, or getting out of a chair
- Unsteadiness or holding onto furniture and walls to move around
- Recent falls, or bruises that may indicate unreported falls
- Trouble with stairs
- Fear of falling that limits their daily activity



HOME SAFETY HAZARDS

- Little or no fresh food in the house
- Spoiled or expired food in the fridge
- Evidence of skipped meals or relying only on snacks
- Trouble cooking or using kitchen appliances safely
- Unexplained weight loss or gain



DRIVING

- Little or no fresh food in the house
- Spoiled or expired food in the fridge
- Evidence of skipped meals or relying only on snacks
- Trouble cooking or using kitchen appliances safely
- Unexplained weight loss or gain

See Next Page for More Signs & What to Do Next

Additional Warning Signs



MONEY MANAGEMENT

- Unpaid or forgotten bills, or services being cut off
- Unusual purchases or spending
- Vulnerability to scams, telemarketers, or suspicious mail
- Large sums of cash lying around, or missing money
- Difficulty handling routine banking or checkbook tasks



MOOD, BEHAVIOR & SOCIAL LIFE

- Withdrawing from friends, family, or activities they used to enjoy
- Signs of depression, loneliness, or persistent sadness
- Increased anxiety, irritability, or agitation
- Paranoia or unusual suspicion of others
- Loss of interest in appearance or surroundings

What to Do Next

- **Track patterns, not one-offs.** Jot down what you observe with dates. A record helps you and a doctor see whether things are truly changing.
- **Rule out treatable causes first.** Sudden confusion, in particular, can be caused by infections, dehydration, or medications – talk to a physician before assuming permanent decline.
- **Ask for a professional assessment.** A doctor, geriatric care manager, or occupational therapist can formally evaluate whether someone can safely live alone and what support might help.
- **Involve your family member in the conversation.** Approach it with respect and focus on their safety and independence rather than "taking over." People are far more receptive when they feel heard.
- **Explore the range of options.** Loss of independence isn't all-or-nothing – in-home help, meal delivery, medical alert systems, adult day programs, and home modifications can extend safe independent living for many people.

This checklist is for general guidance and is not a substitute for a professional medical or care assessment.



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