

Many seniors suffer mental decline in silence, CDC reports

May 9 2013, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter



While 1 in 8 has memory problems and confusion, too few seek help.

(HealthDay)—About 13 percent of Americans 60 and older say they have increasing problems with thinking and memory and that they suffer growing confusion, a new report released Thursday shows.

One-third of these people add that the confusion or [memory loss](#) caused problems at work or with social activities and household chores, according to the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

The findings underscore the need to be alert for early signs of [dementia](#) or Alzheimer's disease, experts said.

"This is the first data of this kind," said report co-author Angela Deokar,

a CDC public health advisor. In 2011, [older adults](#) from 21 states answered survey items on whether they'd suffered increased confusion or memory loss in the past year.

According to Deokar, signs to look out for include the following:

- Asking the same questions over and over again,
- Getting lost in familiar places,
- Not being able to follow directions,
- Becoming more confused about time, people and places.

These problems go beyond normal [forgetfulness](#), Deokar said.

Since this is the first such report, it is not possible to see if there is an increasing trend or if these data are similar throughout the nation, she said. The survey is ongoing, however, so in a couple of years more information should be available.

The report was published in the May 10 issue of the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

People experiencing [cognitive decline](#)—the gradual loss of the ability to think, reason and remember—can face considerable challenges. Even so, only 35 percent of them have discussed the problem with their doctor, the researchers found.

Such conversations are important, because they make planning for the future easier as a person's mental health continues to decline, according to the report.

A dementia expert noted that these kinds of symptoms should be taken seriously.

People experiencing them "should have thorough medical exams to exclude treatable metabolic or cardiac diseases," said Dr. Sam Gandy, associate director of the Mount Sinai Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, in New York City.

Report co-author Deokar noted that people with these symptoms can reach out to the aging services network, including agencies on aging and the Alzheimer's Association.

When causes of mental decline are identified early there is the opportunity to treat reversible causes, the report authors said. If the cause isn't reversible, as with Alzheimer's disease, there is more time to develop advance directives, to enroll in clinical trials and to plan for care needs.

More information: To learn about Alzheimer's disease, visit the [Alzheimer's Association](#).

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