

Loved ones' mild memory problems require vigilance

September 10 2013, by Dr. Gregory Jicha

Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) is experienced by many as a harbinger of future memory problems like Alzheimer's disease. Individuals suffering from MCI are often able to maintain independent lives, but there are special safety considerations for those with even mild memory problems. With proper planning and support, these individuals can remain independent for as long as possible.

Physical [safety](#) considerations for those with mild memory problems fall into four main categories: [medication safety](#), [driving safety](#), nutritional and fluid intake, and cooking and home safety.

Medication safety is important for anyone with even a mild memory problem, because they may forget to take medications, or take them more than once, resulting in taking more than the prescribed dosage. For patients on medications for conditions like blood pressure, heart disease or diabetes this can be very dangerous. In fact, [medication errors](#) are the number one reason people with mild memory problems have to visit the hospital. To help a loved one take medication safely, family and friends can help by providing oversight of medication administration, and using tools like preloaded pillbox organizers or automated pill dispensers.

Even mild memory problems can greatly influence safety while driving. Addressing this issue is difficult as most equate driving with independence. This situation is reversed with even the most mild of memory problems, where driving becomes a threat to independence. The American Academy of Neurology has a formal set of recommendations

to evaluate driving issues in those with even mild memory problems. You should raise this issue with your doctor and ask for an evaluation. Many communities have driving services available for [older adults](#), and many people find a significant cost savings trading in the costs of car ownership for a driving service

People with memory problems may either forget to eat and drink, or forget that they have already eaten, and then eat too much. Any significant weight loss or gain of more than 10 pounds or 10 percent of body weight could signal a problem. Recurrent urinary tract infections or dehydration can also mean a person is not getting sufficient fluids.

Receiving meal reminders from loved ones may help with this problem.

Even mild [memory problems](#) can influence cooking and [home safety](#). A burner left on can lead to a kitchen fire, a faucet left running can overflow, and confusion while using yard work equipment can be quite dangerous. Making sure smoke detectors are installed throughout the home and are in working order is important, and offering to help with chores can be a big help.

If you are uncomfortable with the safety of a living situation, it is probably unsafe, and needs to change. A safe environment can prevent the catastrophe that forces a loved one from moving into a skilled nursing facility permanently.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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