

# Noticing Something Different This Year?

The holidays bring families together in ways everyday life doesn't, and those gatherings often reveal changes in aging parents that weren't noticeable during brief calls or video chats. December's visits can be joyful, but they can also raise quiet concerns: Something seems different this year.



One of the earliest signs families notice is **repetition**. A parent may retell the same story multiple times in one evening or ask identical questions without recalling the response. You might also see **shifts in conversation skills** — losing track of topics, struggling to follow group discussions, or withdrawing because the noise and pace feel overwhelming.

Changes around food preparation can also be revealing. Someone who once handled holiday meals with ease may now mix up ingredients, forget steps, or feel unsure using familiar appliances. Even minor confusion in the kitchen can signal deeper challenges with memory or executive functioning.



Physical changes matter too. A slower, shuffling gait, increased unsteadiness, or hesitation on stairs can indicate cognitive changes intertwined with balance and coordination. Families sometimes overlook these shifts, but they're important clues.



After the holidays, home care can provide critical stability — helping with meals, routines, mobility, and safety while offering the oversight families need when memory concerns arise. Even part-time support can make a meaningful difference.

If you do spot changes, approach the conversation with empathy. Focus on safety and support rather than labels. A visit to a primary care provider or a cognitive assessment can offer clarity and reassurance.

It's equally important to remember that not all forgetfulness equals dementia. Occasional slips are normal with age. The red flags appear when these behaviors grow more frequent, noticeable, or disruptive.

The holidays can be eye-opening, but they also present a valuable opportunity: noticing changes early and taking steps to ensure aging parents stay safe, supported, and well-cared-for in the year ahead.



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