



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Memory Maintenance

*Difficulties Associated with Self-Reported Confusion or Memory Loss
Among Adults Aged ≥ 60 Years – United States, 21 States, 2011*

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Approximately one in eight adults over the age of 60 experiences some degree of confusion or memory loss. These cognitive changes often lead to social isolation and limit the ability to live independently.

Angela Deokar is a health educator with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss the emerging problem of cognitive decline among older adults. Welcome to the show, Angie.

[Angela Deokar] Thank you. It's great to be here.

[Dr. Gaynes] Angie, what do you mean by cognitive decline in older adults?

[Angela Deokar] Really, what we're talking about is someone who is experiencing increased confusion or memory loss that is happening more often or getting worse over the past year. These could be caused by conditions, such as Alzheimer's disease or dementia, or some other reasons could be depression or adverse effects of medications.

[Dr. Gaynes] How can you tell the difference between normal signs of aging and a potentially serious cognitive decline?

[Angela Deokar] Typically, normal memory loss usually doesn't prevent someone from living a full and productive life. For example, we've all forgotten names or misplaced things occasionally. These changes are generally more manageable and, for the most part, don't disrupt the ability to work, live independently, and maintain a social life. More serious problems may include getting lost in familiar places; trouble handling money and paying bills; repeating questions over and over again; taking longer to complete familiar tasks, such as following a recipe; increasingly poor judgment; losing things frequently or misplacing them in odd places; mood and personality changes; and mixing up words. So, for example, saying "chair" instead of "bed." Just because a person shows some of these signs, does not mean that they have a serious problem or a disease, but it is important to discuss these symptoms with family and health care providers.

[Dr. Gaynes] How do these problems impact a person's everyday life?

[Angela Deokar] Memory problems can cause people to withdraw due to difficulties that they're experiencing at work or with volunteer or social activities. They may also make it difficult to perform household chores which could affect the ability to live independently.

[Dr. Gaynes] Angie, are cognitive disorders treatable?

[Angela Deokar] I discussed some causes earlier, for example, depression or interactions from medications that *are* treatable. For Alzheimer's disease or other dementias, there is no cure at this time. But active medical and care management can improve the quality of life.

[Dr. Gaynes] Why is it important for someone go to a health care provider for a possible cognitive disorder if they're often untreatable?

[Angela Deokar] Well, that's a really good question and an important one. Medications and care techniques are available to delay symptoms and reduce behavioral problems that can be associated with conditions, such as wandering, agitation, or anxiety. If there is an early and accurate diagnosis, it can also enable individuals and caregivers to better anticipate needs and plan for the future. For example, the diagnosis allows time to plan for care needs, financial planning, or completion of an advance directive.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are problems with memory loss or confusion preventable?

[Angela Deokar] The most important factors are aging and genetics which are beyond our control. For other things, the jury is still out. For example, we don't know whether lifestyle factors, such as being physically active or high cholesterol can affect this. But there is a lot of research on-going to find a prevention and cure for this condition.

[Dr. Gaynes] Angie, where can listeners get more information about cognitive disorders?

[Angela Deokar] They can go to our website at cdc.gov/features/alzheimers, spelled a-l-z-h-e-i-m-e-r-s.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Angie. I've been talking today with CDC's Angela Deokar about memory loss and confusion among older adults.

Remember, signs of serious memory problems include getting lost in familiar places, trouble handling money, and repeating questions. If you or someone you know is having problems with memory loss, talk to a health care provider.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.