

Early Warning Signs Caregivers Should Never Ignore

Subtle changes in older adults are often the **first signal that a medical problem is developing.**

Many hospital visits begin with early warning signs that appear **days or even weeks beforehand.**

Learning to recognize these signals can help caregivers respond earlier and prevent situations from escalating.

Changes in Mental Status

Changes in thinking or behavior are often one of the **earliest warning signs** that something is wrong.

Watch for:

- New confusion
- Increased forgetfulness
- Sudden agitation or irritability
 - Unusual sleepiness
 - Personality changes

In older adults, sudden mental changes can be associated with:

- Infection
- Dehydration
- Medication reactions
- Metabolic problems

These changes **should always be taken seriously.**

Sudden Changes in Energy

A noticeable drop in energy can signal that the body is **struggling to compensate for an underlying problem.**

Warning signs include:

- Sleeping much more than usual
- Difficulty getting out of bed or a chair
- Fatigue that seems out of proportion
- Reduced participation in normal activities

Caregivers often describe this as:

"They just seem weaker than usual."

Appetite and Fluid Changes

Changes in eating or drinking habits can quickly lead to complications in older adults.

Watch for:

- Loss of appetite
- Eating significantly less than normal
 - Drinking very little fluids
 - Complaints of nausea
 - Rapid weight changes

Dehydration and poor nutrition can contribute to:

- Weakness
 - Falls
 - Confusion
- Hospitalization

Mobility Changes

Small mobility changes are often a **major warning sign**.

Pay attention to:

- New balance problems
 - Slower walking
 - Difficulty standing up
- Increased use of furniture for support
 - New or increased falls

Mobility changes often occur **before a larger medical event**.

Breathing or Circulation Changes

Changes in breathing or circulation should never be ignored.

Watch for:

- Shortness of breath
- New swelling in legs or feet
 - Chest discomfort
 - Persistent coughing
- Bluish lips or fingers

These symptoms can indicate **heart or lung problems that require prompt evaluation.**

When to Seek Help

If you notice **sudden or unexplained changes**, it's important to act early.

Consider reaching out to a healthcare provider if:

- Symptoms are worsening
- A person cannot perform normal daily activities
 - There is sudden confusion or weakness
 - You feel something is not right

Caregivers often have strong instincts.

If something feels off, it is **worth investigating sooner rather than later**.

****In older adults, small changes are often the first signal that something bigger is developing****