

Common causes of dementia-like symptoms

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Unfortunately, a lot of us tend to avoid or downplay health issues, especially when it comes to memory or cognitive issues. "Oh, I'm sure it will get better soon." "Lots of people have problems like this." "This is nothing new." We might hear this from friends, family, neighbors which can make it really challenging to push back on the 'status quo' and encourage them to see a medical professional. While seeking an evaluation has a host of benefits and support, it also, on occasion, can detect treatable or reversible symptoms of dementia. This month, I'm highlighting a couple of common treatable causes. This information is covered in our community education program, "Memory Loss: What You Need To Know" which is now recorded and on our website at www.effinghamalz.org. Keep in mind that if there is a presence of any cognitive changes, it's beneficial to seek a thorough evaluation.

Medication interactions and/or side effects

Especially for people living with other diseases, medication interactions can be a common cause for cognitive changes. To be proactive, it's helpful to have regular conversations with your doctor to evaluate whether prescriptions are still needed. It's also helpful to speak with your pharmacist and request a medication review to make sure there aren't any interactions or contraindications easily detected. There also might be unintentional side effects of medications that cause dementia symptoms as well. It's important to monitor these effects. Keeping a medical journal, especially when medication is modified, is helpful to understand when you first began noticing changes.

Depression

Dementia symptoms can often mask another common illness – depression. A thorough cognitive evaluation should include a depression screening to evaluate for any present symptoms. Sometimes if a person receives treatment for depression, dementia symptoms may lessen or cease.

Thyroid issues

Hypothyroidism, a condition where there is reduced production of the thyroid hormone, can often cause memory and cognitive changes. To test for this condition, a physician looks to gauge thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) levels.

Other common treatable causes of dementia-like symptoms include vitamin deficiencies, infections, uncontrolled/undetected diabetes, alcohol abuse, or Lyme disease. While not all dementia symptoms may be reversible or treatable, it's important to keep in mind these common causes. A thorough cognitive evaluation should encompass testing in all of these areas and more.

Much of this information was condensed from the Alzheimer's Association, NIH, and American Thyroid Association websites.

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.