



Signs and symptoms of dementia

Akshita Nanda
Correspondent

It can be difficult for most people to tell the difference between the behaviour characteristic of ageing and symptoms of dementia, says Dr Vina Doshi, consultant physician and specialist in geriatric medicine at AgeWell Seniors Clinic in Farrer Park Hospital.

Normal forgetfulness is when a

person might suddenly forget where an item is, but later the information comes back quickly and is correct, she says.

Dementia, in contrast, is marked by patterns of repetition which occur due to poor short-term memory.

Dr Doshi adds: "It's not just memory loss and forgetting who came to visit yesterday. Dementia affects other aspects of day-to-day functioning. There are issues with language as well. The person can't

find words to describe things and is forgetting names."

Dr Linus Chua, associate consultant at St Luke's Hospital, says the key difference between symptoms of dementia and normal ageing is "the loss of ability to function independently safely".

He adds that people with dementia often exhibit behaviour which causes stress to caregivers. They often repeat comments and questions, get agitated easily, may get

confused in the evening and have trouble sleeping through the night.

Persons with dementia may become aggressive or accuse others of stealing their belongings.

He says: "They may start to wander in the community and get lost, forget to turn off the stove and to pay when buying things in shops.

"As dementia progresses, they may forget how to care for themselves, needing care in basic activities of daily living such as toileting,

keeping clean and eating."

Dr Doshi says early intervention is key since dementia can be managed through medication and other therapies. However, people often deny the onset of dementia in themselves or their loved ones.

She says: "People like to brush this away. They say: 'This is normal ageing, what do you expect?'"

"But if a 60-year-old says he or she is becoming forgetful, alarm bells should start ringing."