STOUGHTON HEALTH

Senior Life Solutions®

THE HOLIDAY CHECK-IN: SUBTLE SIGNS YOUR OLDER LOVED ONE NEEDS HELP



Holiday visits can offer families time to reconnect and notice how an older adult is doing at home. A change in mood, routine, connection, or the home environment may signal that added support would be helpful. One observation doesn't explain the full picture, but a caring conversation can help a family member better understand what is going on.

Look for Changes in Everyday Routines

Pay attention to whether familiar routines feel harder to manage. You may notice unopened mail, an empty refrigerator, a change in personal care, missed medications, or clothing that does not fit the weather. Consider whether the home feels different from prior visits, including clutter that creates a fall risk, burned-out lights, or appliances that are hard to use.

These changes can have many causes, including a health condition, mobility concerns, a recent loss, financial pressure, or difficulty getting out during winter weather.

Start by asking open questions. "How have things been going at home?" or "Is there anything that has become harder lately?" can invite a productive conversation.

See the next page for more.

Notice Mood, Interest, and Energy

An older adult may show distress through withdrawal, irritability, worry, low energy, changes in sleep or appetite, or losing interest in activities they usually enjoy. Sadness may not always be the main sign. Notice patterns that have continued for weeks, seem to be getting worse, or interfere with day-to-day life.

The National Institute on Aging encourages families to watch for changes in mood and interest. Depression can affect how a person feels, acts, and thinks, and support is available. A mental health professional can help an older adult sort through symptoms, grief, stress, and other concerns.

Pay Attention to Connection

Ask who the older adult has talked with recently and whether winter weather, transportation, hearing changes, caregiving responsibilities, or mobility are making connection harder. An older adult may want more contact even when they are surrounded by family during a holiday visit. A regular phone call, a ride to a community activity, or a plan for a weather day can support them after the holiday visit ends.

Check in with Caregivers, Too

A caregiver may be coordinating meals, medications, appointments, transportation, household needs, and family expectations. Ask how they are sleeping and whether they have help. Caregiver strain can affect the whole support system, especially during a busy season.

Start with a Caring Conversation

- Choose a private moment and lead with what you've noticed.
- Ask open questions, then allow time for the person to respond.
- Offer one specific form of help, such as arranging a ride, making a call together, or setting a regular check-in time.
- Talk about support options now. The holiday season doesn't have to end before a person reaches out.

When to Seek Help

Connect with a health care provider or mental health professional when changes are persistent, affect daily functioning, or raise concern for the older adult or those close to them. If someone talks about hopelessness, feeling like a burden, or wanting to die, seek immediate support. Call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org.

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department if there is immediate danger.

WE CAN HELP.

Our hospital-based outpatient program is designed to meet the unique needs of older adults experiencing depression and/or anxiety related to life changes that are often associated with aging or a chronic diagnosis. Anyone can make a referral to our program, including self-referrals, provider referrals, or community consultations.

Call us today at (608) 501-6260